The Mythical

A STUDY ON
VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF
MYTHICAL BEINGS OF FOLK RELIGION
IN ANCIENT FINLAND

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Abstract

This thesis looks at Finnish myths and their visualizations in children's books and comics. The thesis aims to answer the question 'How should an illustrator approach illustrating Finnish myths and folklore for children?' The purpose of this thesis is to explore visualizations of Finnish myths and to estimate how much artistic freedom can be used in interpretations of myths. In this practice-based research I approach the subject through a literature review, by examining existing illustrations and visualizations and through my own creative process. As a result, I have created visualizations of Finnish mythical beings for children and exhibited them in Galleria Kuvitus, Helsinki.

The thesis consists of a written part and an artistic production. The written part examines Finnish myths and their visual interpretations. The research analyses the theoretical framework of myths and illustration as research subjects as well as the problems related to studying myths and folklore. The thesis discusses ancient belief systems which created the myths and how illustrators have so far interpreted them. In this research I examine the possibilities for artistic freedom and imagination in interpreting myths. I analyse the research material I found on the mythical beings I chose to illustrate and what influenced my interpretations.

In the production part I turn the observations into practise. I create a self-initiated artistic project in which I illustrate various Finnish mythical beings in different techniques and exhibit the finished illustrations in a gallery in Helsinki. I reflect on the artistic process in comparison to my research findings and evaluate what is considered a successful interpretation of a myth. I also contemplate on the choices I made about creating illustrations aimed for children. During the process I question my creative choices and design practices and explain in detail the build-up of the exhibition from research material to sketches and into final execution. In my research I come to the conclusion that artists are free to interpret myths in imaginative ways and there is no wrong way to visualize them due to the nature of the myths.

Keywords Finnish myths, mythology, children's illustration, character design, artistic work, exhibitions

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Tiivistelmä

Tämä opinnäytetyö tarkastelee suomalaisia myyttejä ja niiden visualisointeja suomalaisissa lastenkirjoissa ja sarjakuvissa. Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on vastata kysymykseen 'Kuinka kuvittajan tulisi lähestyä suomalaisia myyttejä ja kansanperinnettä lapsille suunnatuissa teoksissa?' Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella visualisointeja suomalaisista myyteistä ja arvioida kuinka paljon myyttien tulkinnoissa voidaan käyttää taiteellista vapautta. Tässä käytännönläheisessä tutkimuksessa lähestyn aihetta kirjallisuuskatsauksen avulla, tutkimalla olemassa olevia kuvituksia ja visualisointeja sekä oman luovan prosessini kautta. Tuloksena olen luonut lapsille suunnattuja visualisointeja suomalaisista myyttisistä olennoista ja esitellyt ne näyttelyssä Galleria Kuvituksessa Helsingissä.

Opinnäytetyö koostuu kirjallisesta ja taiteellisesta osasta. Kirjallinen osa tarkastelee suomalaisia myyttejä ja niiden visuaalisia tulkintoja. Tutkimus analysoi myyttien ja niiden kuvitusten teoreettista viitekehystä sekä myyttien ja kansanperinteen tutkimiseen liittyviä ongelmia. Opinnäytetyössä käsitellään myyttejä luoneita muinaisia uskomusjärjestelmiä, sekä tarkastellaan miten kuvittajat ovat toistaiseksi tulkinneet suomalaista myytistöä. Tässä tutkimuksessa tutkin taiteellisen vapauden ja mielikuvituksen mahdollisuuksia myyttien tulkinnassa sekä analysoin löytämääni tutkimusmateriaalia, joka oli pohjana taiteellisiin tulkintoihini myyttisistä olennoista.

Taiteellisessa tuotanto-osassa yhdistän havaintoni käytäntöön. Luon taiteellisen projektin, jossa esittelen erilaisia suomalaisia myyttisiä olentoja kuvitettuina eri tekniikoilla ja esittelen valmiit kuvitukset galleriassa Helsingissä. Pohdin taiteellista prosessia kokonaisuutena ja arvioin sitä, mitä pidetään onnistuneena myytin tulkintana. Mietin myös valintoja, jotka tein lapsille suunnattujen kuvien toteutuksessa. Kyseenalaistan prosessin aikana tekemiäni luovia valintoja sekä suunnittelumenetelmiäni ja avaan yksityiskohtaisesti näyttelyn syntyprosessin tutkimusmateriaalista luonnoksiin ja lopulliseen toteutukseen. Tutkimuksessani tulen siihen johtopäätelmään, että taiteilijat voivat vapaasti tulkita myyttejä mielikuvituksellisilla tavoilla, eikä myyttien luonteen vuoksi ole väärää tapaa visualisoida niitä.

Avainsanat suomalaiset myytit, mytologia, kuvitus, lasten kuvitus, hahmosuunnittelu, taiteellinen työskentely, näyttely

Contents

Chapter 1:
Introduction

1.1. Visual interpretations for children about mythical beings in Finland

This thesis looks at the visual representations of mythical beings of folk religion in ancient Finland. I investigate the spirits as beings who have been believed, or known, to exist, and how they have later been visualized. This thesis is an artistic practice-based research.

The thesis consists of nine chapters. The first chapter introduces the theoretical framework of myths and illustration as research subjects as well as the purpose of this research. The second chapter looks at what myths and folklore are and the problems related to studying them. In the third chapter I discuss Finnish myths and ancient belief systems which created the myths.

The fourth chapter reviews the research material as well as looks into how illustrators have so far interpreted the Finnish myths.The fift chapter assesses how to interpret myths and folklore as an artist as well as evaluates the possibilities of artistic freedom and imagination. In the sixth chapter I contemplate on the choices I made before illustrating my personal interpretations of the mythical beings and discuss the topic of illustrating only cute characters for children.

In the seventh chapter I reveal the mythical characters I chose to visualize. I analyze the research material I found on them and what influenced my interpretations. In chapter 8 I explain in detail how I created the artworks of this thesis as well as the exhibition, and how the outcome turned into radio- and podcast interviews. Finally, in chapter 9 I share the conclusions and final thoughts about the whole research process and the artistic process as well as what will happen after the thesis.

My research material consisted mostly of books written by Finnish folklore researchers about Finnish folk religion. I also studied material written by other illustrators and thesis writers as well as online articles and interviews. I studied how the Finnish mythical beings have been described earlier in history and how they are visualized today. In my research I tried to understand the meaning of the mythical beings in the community of their time and study artistic interpretations of them. I focused on how the interpretations have evolved until the modern times and what problems artists today may face when visualizing myths.

The purpose of this thesis for me personally was to understand the world of Finnish myths and mythology from an illustrator's point of view. I hope my research will give other illustrators a better understanding on how to approach myths as a subject. I wish to especially encourage illustrators to boldly use their own imagination in their artistic interpretations and visualizations of myths.

The research question for this study was "How should an illustrator approach illustrating Finnish myths and folklore for children?" The purpose of this thesis work is to discuss what an illustrator needs to take into account when visualizing Finnish mythological beings. It explores the special features and problems of illustrating myths and using mythical beings as a basis for character design.

1.2. Personal motivations

Finland recently celebrated its hundredth year of independence, but the land area of Finland has a populated history of 10 000-12 000 years. The recent anniversary raised plenty of interest in our ancient history, and several artists created various interpretations of Finnish myths. The Finnish Literature Society also re-published old research material, which helped me greatly in my research. Still, despite the increased interest and fresh material, I still struggled with finding imagery of our myths suitable for my research purposes. This raised the question of why exactly it was so hard to find interpretations of our ancient myths. When one looks at for example Japanese or Greek myths, the interpretations and illustrations are plentiful and vary greatly. The fact that Finland is younger as a country is a likely reason for the lack of interpretations, but I had a feeling there was more to it. I wondered, if the myths were simply not well known of and without visualizations they didn't reach as wide an audience as those myths that were illustrated.
This realization motivated me to take a deeper look into this and find out how to inspire illustrators in Finland to take an interest in creating new, modern visualizations of our ancient folklore. I also wanted to find out for myself more about the myths, the research done on them and what kinds of illustrations there might be out there, which I simply might not know about.

For this practice-based thesis I created illustrations of six Finnish mythical beings. Three of them are agricultural spirits: Ägräs, Pellonpekko and Sämpsä Pellervoinen. The other three are spirits of the forest: Tapio, Hiisi and Maahinen. All of them have been understood differently in different times in various areas of Finland. In my artistic interpretations I argue that the beings do not need to be visualized as human-like beings and I discuss how an illustrator of myths is always faced with personal choices. The illustrations I created were aimed for small children. The illustrations will later be used on various media and they serve as character studies for my upcoming comic for children which I got two art grants for from Sarjakuvantekijät ry and WSOYn Kirjallisuussäätiö in 2020.

The aim of my master's thesis is to examine the conventions surrounding the visualizations of Finnish myths as well as to illustrate beings in our myths which so far have only a few visual representations. I feel that most of the imagery on Finnish myths today is illustrated for adults and likely not interesting or suitable to children. The books aimed at children are mostly handbook-types of nonfiction or they re-tell the stories of Kalevala. The objective of my thesis' artistic work is to create modern character illustrations of the old spirits. These characters will then be used in a comic for today's children to learn more about them. This way I hope to bring these myths back to light and give them to a new audience. The visual narrative is not a part of this thesis, but a continuation of it.

My thesis is written in English because, although there is plenty of material in Finnish, it was quite difficult to find any research material in English. With the language choice I hope to enable also English-speaking artists to take an interest in Finnish myths.

1.3. Why is it important to study and understand myths and folklore?

As stated in the decrees of the Finnish Literature Society from 1831, "in ancient memories and contemplation, the people see the root of their being, embracing their present state and value."[1] (Piela, 2019, p. 552). Keeping ancient myths alive gives us a feeling of being part of a culture that has deep roots. The stories teach us where we come from, how our ancestors saw the world and what kind of relationship they had with the nature around them, as well as the animals. Many of the old ideas they had have been passed down for generations, and still affect us today.

In the recent years there seems to have been a growing interest towards "Finnishness" and our ancient myths. Folklore researcher Risto Pulkkinen writes, that "many people feel that in an integrating world, knowledge of one's own national cultural roots has become increasingly important for the preservation of one's identity." (Pulkkinen, 2014, p. 355). By knowing where we come from and what we have been, we can learn to appreciate what other cultures offer us and evaluate what we wish to take in and what to keep.
Myths make up a major part of our heritage. They serve, for one, as a reminder of who we are and where we come from. Around the world local myths are valued and re-told in countless ways. In Japan the ancient spirits are especially well respected. Japanese people still today wash and dress the old statues in their shrines. I wish we would one day find a similar respect for our cultural stories, the spirits, and the myths of our ancestors.

1.4. Teaching children about the myths and why visualizations are needed

I chose to create my illustrations for children, because I felt that most of the visualizations of Finnish myths were not aimed for children or functional for educational purposes. My versions may not be the most informative either in some respect, but they could feed the children's imagination.
Partanen talks about illustrating for children in her thesis Kuinka Sykkyrämyyrä rakennetaan. She highlights, that according to Teresa Colomer, the return of nostalgic subjects such as folk tales and educational stories have recently grown in popularity in children's literature. (Partanen, 2018). She discusses what Anja Hatva has analyzed: it has been found that with children under 8 years of age, illustration works better in promoting memory and understanding than a photograph. Hatva emphasizes that especially color cartoons benefit young children more than other illustration styles. (Hatva, 1993, as cited by Partanen, 2018).
After reading about all the intriguing stories I found during my research, I wished I could have learned about them when I was a child myself. Although my parents have always loved books and read many of them to me and my brother, it is difficult to teach your children about something you can't find a book or visualizations about. I hope that by the time I have children, I will have a book in my hands which I can read to them and it will be all about these fantastic Finnish mythical stories I have found.

During the process of my thesis I found out I was not alone with my wish. Several of my friends who had children said they would love to have something to teach their children about Finnish ancient myths. I believe that until now Kalevala has served this purpose, but its stories do not interest everyone. And for those who wish to find other Finnish myths, there are plenty to be found. They are simply not in a form which would be easy for children to read and understand.

Kalevala is also often illustrated with human figures and have somewhat of a realistic approach. The stories of Kalevala have been presented in art books, comics, children's books, theatre plays and in many other forms. There are versions of Kalevala for children, such as Mauri Kunnas's Koirien Kalevala (1992) and Don Rosa's The Quest for Kalevala (1999). Because of these, Kalevala's stories are highly approachable for children, and I will leave Kalevala mostly aside in my thesis and concentrate on the other myths I have found.

In the end it all comes down to passing traditions on to the next generation. According to Elizabeth Tucker's study on modern children's folklore and urban legends, kids find new ways to share traditions that interest them. (Tucker, E. 2008). My wish is that children would learn about the Finnish myths and find their own ways to interpret them, and to eventually pass them on.

[1] All direct quotes from original Finnish sources are my own translations from Finnish.

Chapter 2:
Myths and mythology

In this chapter I will shortly discuss what myths and folklore are or how some define them. I will briefly mention the differences between folklore and fairytales as well as Jungian archetypes, which we often confront in mythical stories. This chapter serves as a short, general preface to the second chapter about the historical background of the myths in Finland.

2.1. What are myths and mythology?

There are probably as many definitions of a myth as a concept as there are definers. Anna-Leena Siikala, professor emeritus of folk-belief in University of Helsinki, has collected various explanation of myths in her book Mythology of Baltic Sea Finns, Itämerensuomalaisten mytologia. She writes that terms myth and mythology originated during the romantic era, when in European culture there was a wish to differentiate the views of educated Christians from the stories of primitive cultures. (Frog, 2014; Siikala, 2014, as cited in Karlsson, 2016.)

According to Siikala, the myths deal with existence and guaranteeing its continuity and problems. They don't necessarily offer explanations but are instead open to interpretation. (Siikala, 2014, as cited in Karlsson, 2016.) Interpretation of myths is always subjective, whether it's about telling them orally or visually. In her book Siikala explains how greatly the various stories differ from each other: a study on the differences between two singers' repertoire demonstrates a lack of a common and coherent view as well as describes the individual variation of myths.

Fig 1. Sketch. Miila Westin 2019.

Siikala analyses whether myths need an internally coherent structure, or whether they are allowed to change shape and form. "The current study of myths stems from the idea that myths are seen as permanent, as fundamental symbols, and on the other hand in a continuous kaleidoscopic movement of images that are constantly being re-interpreted." (Doty, 2000; Siikala, 2012; Frog, 2014, as cited in Karlsson, 2016, p.11).

As we can see, myths vary in shape and form and are interpreted differently depending on the needs, social structures and worldviews of the times. They keep changing from one re-telling to the next, which allows freedom for the artists who interpret them. The new interpretations are simply a continuation of a never ending flow.

Myths serve many purposes, which is one of the reasons they keep changing. As Honko writes, "The myth has been understood as a source of cognitive categories, a form of symbolic expression, a subconscious projection, a worldview that facilitates adaptation, a behavioural guide, a legitimator of social institutions, a marker of social relevance, a mirror of culture and social structure, a consequence of a historical situation, a religious communication or genre, and a mediator of the structure." (Honko, as cited in Siikala, 2014, p.51).

Mythology is a collection of myths, often including gods, characters and stories. Different theories argue whether the myths have travelled around the world, or whether, for one, they independently sprung up from human subconscious in each culture. Egg creation myth, for example, appears in Finnish, Egyptian, Greek and even Chinese myths. The reason is unclear to the researchers, and the theories vary.

Myths are seen as explanations of nature as well as instructions of behaviour. They are thought of as carriers of deep knowledge as well as presentations of social order. Myths contain many other functions but going deeper into the theories of myths is outside the scope of this thesis. I will simply include here a short part of Joseph Campbell's talk on how he categorizes myths. This is one example.

Campbell arranges the basic functions of myths in human societies into four categories: mystical or metaphysical, cosmological, social and psychological. "The basic functions of a traditional mythology of this sort are first to open the mind of everybody in this society to that mystery dimension which cannot be analysed, cannot be talked about, but can only be experienced as out there and in here at once. And the second function is to present an image of the universe. A cosmic image, which will reflect that dimension…— — — which has never been fathomed and never can be. The third function is to present a social order by which people will be co-ordinated to that. — — And finally, the fourth function, is to carry the individual through the stages of life, from birth through maturity through senility to death…" "The macrocosm of the great cosmos, the microcosm of the individual, the order of the society, are all co-ordinated in one great unit pointing past it all to this mystery dimension." (Campbell, 2013)

Fig 2. Gallen-Kallela, A. (1895). Sammon puolustus. Finnish National Gallery.

2.2. Folklore or a fairy tale

Folklore is created by people who construct their own way of communication and it can be poetry, proverbs, superstitions, myths, legends, prayer and so on. Folklore evolves and changes constantly. When a person hears a story it likely already changes then and there.

Finnish folklorists try to find a bigger form in Finnish folklore, but so far it is simply a lot of stories loosely combined together. "In Finland, folk tales have long been a popular pastime for evening and social gatherings. Originally a fairy tale has been a verbal tale told to adults by one another and it gradually transformed into a children's tradition in the 19th century." (Kivilaakso, 2010, p.1).

The folk religion also absorbed the Christian influence, and soon enough folk healers were asking Christian gods and saints for help, as they were seen as yet another supernatural being to ask help from.

2.3. Archetypes and stereotypes

According to Carl Jung, there are different archetypes in myths; universal, archaic symbols, behind stereotypical thinking that are based on old attitudes and emerge from a collective subconsciousness. The archetypes Jung identifies in the myths are as follows: The Hero, The Mentor, The Threshold Guardians, The Shadow, The Herald, The Trickster, The Shapeshifter, Anima, The Mother and The Child.

The same archetypes appear in different mythologies. Archetype refers to a strong, simplified image of, for example, a hero or a trickster. Archetypes guide thinking so that they make us see things we are used to seeing - or want to see. Identifying a stranger has been important when it came to protecting our own herd so looking for archetypes is very intuitive.

Chapter 3:

The historical background of the myths in Finland

"In Finland, there has never been a unified ancient religion that could be systematized into a Finnish Olympian, a hierarchical mountain of gods." - Veikko Anttonen (Harva, 2018, p.528).

"I couldn't - I didn't even try – to make a perfect Finnish mythology. Writing such a thing would still be a frustrating impossibility for one man at this point in the research: there is too much material and too little pre-work done." – Martti Haavio (Haavio, 1967, p.488).

In this chapter I will shortly explain some general topics about Finnish ancient history, the myths, and the research on them. I will shortly describe what the research on Finnish myths has been based on and what were the three different time periods which greatly affected the myths we know today and partly caused the disappearance of some of the myths. Lastly, I will introduce briefly the chants and rock paintings the ancient Finns left behind, as well as the assumed belief systems they had of death, cyclical time and afterlife, and what their relationship with the nature may have been like.

"Prehistoric people believed that there is life everywhere", reads on the wall of the National Museum of Finland.

3.1. The hunter-gatherers believed in protectors of fishing and hunting

The first hunter gatherers settled in Finland roughly 10 000 years ago as the ice age slowly disappeared. In the next thousands of years, they arrived from all directions and populated different parts of the land area we now call Finland. The tribes and their myths were diverse.

Much of the research of the ancient times is based on rock paintings, poems and comparative research. In the Western parts of Finland there are myths about two protectors of the fishing and hunting culture, forest spirit Tapio and water spirit Ahti. In the Eastern Finland the names for the same beings are Hiisi and Veden emä, mother of water. The landscape affected the myths as well, as the east has more hills while there are more lakes in the central Finland and the sea in the west. (Pulkkinen, 2014).

The ancient people believed in rebirth and cyclicality of time. They relied on their shamans, the leaders and healers of the tribe, who were authorized by the spirits to perform rituals and spells. They served as communicators and escorts between this world and the other world.

3.2. The change to agrarian culture changed the belief systems as well

According to Joseph Campbell, in the early agrarian societies the earth was seen as the mother and myths about her life-giving powers were formed. The focus of the myths turned to the repetitive rhythms of the moon, the crops, the seasons and life and death. (Campbell, J. 1988)

In the southwestern part of Finland, agriculture and animal husbandry arrived in the late Iron Age. It gradually promoted settlements, which led to a dramatic change in the Finnish worldview. (Pulkkinen, 2018). The biggest change the agriculture brought was the way people viewed the boundary between home and the wilderness. Suddenly the forest turned into either useful or harmful, and this naturally affected the stories that were told.

The shamanism slowly faded while magic and spells took over, as people now had neighbors who they envied, and wanted to harm. The soothsayer institution replaced the Shamans as specialists in ancient knowledge and magic.

3.3. The times of syncretism

Christianity arrived in Finland in the 1100s. The Christian conversion work was strong and systematic and in many ways the priests succeeded in intertwining the new religious figures with the old pagan ones. As Pulkkinen (2018) explains, syncretism means the mixing of traditions as the ancient worldview and the later missionary religion, in our case Christianity, are intertwined.

The church introduced permanent cemeteries, which was a difficult concept for people who were afraid of the beings of the afterlife. Many of the local sacred Hiisi forests were torn down or banned from people, which virtually created a new myth about a scary devil- or troll-like being called Hiisi. Several other mythical beings were given attributes of Christian saints, and later it has been a difficult task to differ the old descriptions from the newer ones.

From the beginning of the 15th century the Finnish churches were decorated in what could described as a primitive style. Behind the images is a blend of Christian narratives and pagan folklore, and they are somewhat difficult to understand for the modern viewer. "The selection includes stick -like figures, abstract symbols, plant ornaments, animal figures, stars, suns and trees of life." (Leppänen, 2011).

3.4. Studying the Finnish myths through folk poetry and comparative research

Comparative research has been a great help in differentiating between the various myths. "In Finland, the study of mythology has long been linked to the study of Finno-Ugric cultures, in addition to folklore and religious studies." (Siikala, 2018, p.18). The only material source about pre-historic Finnish ancient religion are rock paintings. The pictures are made with red earth paint and there are almost one hundred known rock art fields in Finland. (Pulkkinen, 2014).

Most of the myths and traditions were passed on as sung poetry. Although people were punished heavily for holding onto any pagan traditions, somehow much of the sung poetry survived. Though studying these poems has proven to be a challenge.

Folk poems form a multi-layered, multi-threaded and nuanced tradition. The poems can roughly be divided into three somewhat overlapping time periods, which we have discussed previously: the shamanistic times, the time of the institution of soothsayers, and the Christian, syncretic era. "These different periods may occur in different layers of one poem, overlapping." (Korte, 2007, p.10).

Matti Kuusi has explained: "Even the first poet was likely to use parts of older poems as building blocks, and after him many re-poets may have modernized the form to their own liking. Thus, the poem at our disposal is not thousands of years old, but instead we have a hundred versions of it." (Korte, 2007, p.10). Likewise,

Fig 3. Map of Scandinavia by Magnus, Olaus. 1539.

the myths changed and overlapped as well, and various versions of the same myths formed in different areas. For this reason, even Lönnrot has said he could have written seven different versions of Kalevala. (Weaver, 2015).

3.5. The myths and the worldviews that formed them

To understand what kinds of spirits the ancient folk believed in, it is important to get an idea of what their environment was like and how they lived. What was important for them, what were they afraid of and what concepts did they believe in?

According to Siikala (2018), the ancient Finns had a North Star-centric worldview, and the center of the world was a giant tree or a mountain. The waterways served as the connectors of "here" and "there" (the afterlife). Everything was thought to be cyclic: water, souls and time. Siikala mentions a few important myths such as the "Earth diver"-world creation myth, the theft and restoration of the lights of the sky and the birth of fire by the giant eagle, the thunderbird.

Nature was thought to be full of all kinds of deities and spirits and astral mythology, animal ceremonialism and shamanism were an integral part of the worldview. (Siikala, 2018). Animals were respected and they served as helpers in many types of spells. Especially the bear was an important animal and was even thought to be related to humans.

The world was full of animism, the belief in väki, strength, and spirit of objects. The forest, as a living thing, was thought to be able to hide anything under its cover, in metsänpeitto. Thunder, water and earth were thought of as human-like, and they could become angry as well as calm down. This is common to many other early animistic belief systems. At the core is the experience that people, plants, animals, mountains and rivers are, at a profound level, part of a coherent whole. (Karppinen, 2015).

All of the wilderness represented the "there" in contrast to "here". "There" or tuonpuoleinen was part of the afterlife, but also the world of the spirits. It is basically everything that is beyond human control and is equal to something 'holy' and respected. As Pulkkinen (2014) describes, the water as well as the forest were strongly "otherworldly" or a part of "there". The mythical spirits and beings, which I am researching in this study, were naturally thought to be "otherworldly". Pulkkinen mentions, that beings of the other side were often described as blue in color.

"There" or "the otherside" was divided into two. As contrast to the underworld, also mentioned as Vainajala, Tuonela and Pohjola, there was another "other side". This was called Ylinen, 'higher' as opposed to Alinen, lower, aka underworld. This place has been called, among other things, Lintukoto, and it was imagined to be somewhere very far away. (Harva, 1948). It was the place where birds were thought to migrate to, and only very small people were able to live there, close to the sky.

The ancient people believed strongly in magic and spells. As Pulkkinen (2014) explains, the spells seek to control the forces of nature and the environment, humans, animals, the various actors of "this side" and the "other side". Especially knowing the origin of an object or phenomenon gave power over it. Also later on integral to the worldview was the concept of happiness, onni, which was a limited good that could not be increased except on the expense of others. This led to beliefs of Kade, enviousness, and Paha silmä, the cursing eye.

3.6. The Kalevala

The oral poetry and myths had long been fading away by the time Finland began to look for its national identity. The image of Finnish myths as a unified ancient story was built in the 18th and 19th centuries in a romantic climate of ideas. Oral poetry was collected and re-mythologized for use by the emerging nation.

Fig 4. Sketch. Miila Westin, 2019.

Elias Lönnrot collected poems in the Eastern Finland and Karelia and modified the varying stories into one longer narrative. He published the first version of Kalevala in 1835 and it launched a large-scale collection of folk poetry. The Kalevala marked an important turning point for Finnish-language culture and caused a stir abroad as well. It brought a small, unknown people to the attention of other Europeans, and bolstered the Finns' self-confidence and faith in the possibilities of the Finnish language and culture. The Kalevala began to be called the Finnish national epic. (Asplund & Mettomäki, 2017).

Although Kalevala is our national epic and it has played an important role in the collection and preservation of our folk culture, I chose not to use the Kalevala as a source of information when looking for descriptions of the old mythical beings. This is mainly because many of the characters, spirits and beings I became interested in during my research were not mentioned in Kalevala.

It is also hard to tell what in the Kalevala is based on old poetry and what is partly the author's imagination. I am not equipped to distinguish the difference, so I rather rely on books and studies of folklorists who are able to do so. In addition, the Kalevala has been well covered and illustrated and, in my research, I attempt to raise familiarity with more obscure and unknown parts of Finnish mythology. For these reasons the Kalevala is not a part of this thesis research.

To find out whether the beings I was interested in were mentioned in the Kalevala, I used the Finnish Literature Society's website (nebu.finlit.fi/Kalevala) to search for mentions of the creatures in the book, using the various names of these beings. Out of the eleven beings I searched for in the Kalevala, three were mentioned. Sämpsä Pellervoinen was described as a "grower of plants" in a sense. Tapio was mentioned several times as the king of the forest. Hiisi is described in the Kalevala as some sort of a devil. The beings which I did not find any mentions about were Pellon pekko, Rongoteus, Para, Tonttu, Ägräs, Liekkiö, Menninkäinen and Hongotar.

3.7. The mythical beings of the ancient times

The Kalevala made various Finnish mythical beings known to larger audiences. At the same time there are dozens of mythical beings which were important to the ancient Finns but were not in any way mentioned in the Kalevala, as described above. The names and purposes of the beings in the myths vary and overlap and the research is ongoing, but I will next attempt to introduce some of the most important spirits and beings that appear in Finnish myths.

At the core of the Finnish worldview was the belief that everything was thought to have a spirit. The spirit of the moon was called Kuutar, Moonlight, as spirit of the day or the sun was named Päivätär, Daylight. Water had various spirits, as did the forest. Houses and sheds had spirits as did the ground the buildings were standing on. Plants and animals had their own protector spirits. For humans this protector spirit was called Luonto, nature, and it was also the name of one of the three "souls" humans were thought to have.

Most of the beings were not considered to be gods, but smaller spirits and deities. Some, though, may have been thought of as powerful gods, such as Ukko, Ilmarinen and Väinämöinen. (Siikala, 2018). Many peoples of the north believed in a creator god who had given power to the lower gods. Ukko, the Finnish high god, is partly influenced by Christian God. (Pulkkinen, 2014). Louhi or Loveatar was the ruler of the cold north or in a sense a god of the afterlife.

Forests were inhabited by all kinds of forest spirits. Tapio, the lord of the forest or even the forest itself, took care of the animals, birds and growth of the forest. In many stories Tapio had a wife, kids, and a house called Tapiola, while in other stories Tapio is a more abstract being which could be also feminine.

When going to the forest, one needed to ask permission from the spirit of the forest, Tapio, to be allowed to hunt there. When hunting for a bear, one needed to ask permission from the "mother of bears", the emuu spirit, Hongotar. Finnish people still use the word for "asking", pyytää, when talking about hunting.

All of the animal species had also their own protector spirit, emuu. Ulla Piela writes in the afterword of Suomalainen mytologia (Haavio, 1967, p.554): "Emuu, for example Käreitär, Hillervo, Tuheroinen and Holohonka, have given birth or created a plant or animal species and then bear the responsibility for the operation and care of this species."

Forest, water, earth and places were thought to have their own spirits called haltija, loosely translated as a keeper or a holder. It was believed that the first person to die somewhere becomes the keeper spirit, haltija, of that place.

Haltija spirits were invisible, but they were able to appear to people in some form if they wished. They have been believed to be able to speak to people in their dreams and take the shape of an animal or insect. (Virtanen, 1988, as cited in Letonsaari, 2009).

The leader of the waters is Ahti or in some areas Vellamo or Vetehinen. She or he bestowed the fishing fortune. The water spirits on the forest ponds were the best healers, while Näkki lurked for prey in rocky coastal waters. (Ranta & Ranta, 1996, as cited in Pohjonen, 2013).

Water spirits lived in the seas, lakes, rivers, wells and springs as well as swamps. The inhabitants of lakes and rivers were mostly calm and friendly, while the most dangerous creatures of the underwater world live in the whirlpools and whirlwinds that flow freely. (Koski, 2007, as cited in Pohjonen, 2013).

Agriculture introduced new beings to worship, such as Ägräs and Pellon pekko. There were also beings which were not necessarily worshipped as such, but they were considered as beings we "live with", called kanssaeläjä. Maahinen is an example of such a being: they lived upside down underground and behaved well if you did not bother them.

Some beings are closely related to myths about the underworld and death, such as Hiisi and Menninkäiset. Menninkäiset were thought to be tiny smelly beings which float around dead people and cemeteries.

This is a very brief explanation of the mythical beings of the Finnish folk religion. When one reads more about the specific mythical creatures, it becomes clear that there are dozens of different versions and descriptions, and they oftentimes overlap and intertwine. For example, the spirit of hares, Kuippana, is at times said to be another name for Tapio, the forest itself, or lord of the forest. I will talk more about this later in chapter 5.

Siikala (2018) also writes about how the abundance of mythical creatures in the myths is confusing. The names and descriptions of the beings vary in different times and areas. In addition to the heroes, the myths include myths of spirits and creatures whose names are still today debated by scholars.

Chapter 4:

The research material and visualizations of Finnish myths

4.1. Literary review

The aim of this research is to study what written mentions and visual representations can be found about Finnish mythical beings and then to create new visualizations of them. For this reason, I first needed to familiarize myself with the research done on Finnish myths and folklore.

As explained in previous chapters, Finnish myths are mostly studied by studying the ancient folk poems and by comparative research. Old poems of the Finnish folklore can be found in the archives maintained by Finnish Literature Society. Although the direct research material is out there, the language of the poems is complicated, and I found it safest to refer to the poems in the books written by folklore researchers. They have the knowledge to interpret the etymological, environmental, linguistic and psychological aspects of the poems.

The books I read were written by famous folklore researchers in Finland and the publishing dates varied from the 1940s to 2019. Many of the authors quoted and referenced each other's works, so it felt important to get an idea what each of them had focused on in their research as well as how the research developed over time. Some of the researchers, Krohn for one, explain the various mythical beings in Finland as based on Christian saints. While the other authors argue against this, it is also important to note that at the time when Krohn wrote his book, people were still imprisoned for blasphemy in Finland.

Out of the books written on Finnish mythology the most recent one I read was written by Anna-Leena Siikala and it was published in 2012.

I also found plenty of material online, but it was noteworthy how little there was to be found in English. I found podcasts on Finnish myths by Perttu Häkkinen as well as on myths in general by, for example, Joseph Campbell. Articles by YLE Finnish Broadcasting company and the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat were helpful and provided plenty of background information as well as individual interviews.

As for visual research, the libraries provided to be my primary source of information about published illustrations on Finnish myths, but I also searched e.g. antique stores, hashtags online and various image databases.

Fig 5. Sämpsä Pellervoinen. Jokinen, Ari. (2007, p. 27).

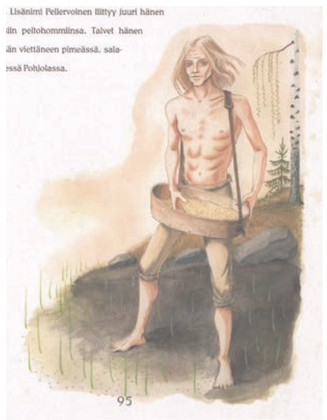

Fig 6. Sämpsä Pellervoinen. Linnea, Sirkku. (2017, p. 95).

I also reached out to the The National Archives of Finland on the matter, and got the following reply to my information request about images of mythical Finnish spirits and beings:

"Unfortunately, to our knowledge, the National Archives does not contain old images of religious beings. --- (written) information on various religious beings has been collected in the index books (tuomiokirjakortisto) --- More information about religious beings may be found in the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society." Ville Kontinen, Inspector general, The National Archives.

The response I received from the Finnish Literature Society was very similar.

"The artwork found about the supernatural beings of Finnish ancient religion is an interesting topic for a thesis. There are no such pictures in the SKS archive picture collections, but there are some illustrations in folklore publications, mostly individual pictures in different books." Kristiina Näyhö, Knowledge Specialist in Cultural Studies, Finnish Literature Society, SKS.

Fig 7. Tapio. Linnea, Sirkku. (2017, p. 62).

Fig 8. Tapio. Jokinen, Ari. (2007, p. 19).

In addition to the research material mentioned so far, I found also other thesis works related to my subject. Tomi Letonsaari has studied the beliefs in forest spirits, metsänhaltijat, and Janika Kaunio focused on the myths about Louhi. Kari Koliseva has studied Syöjätär and its eastern relative Baba Jaga. There is also a thesis on an illustrated children's book about a sauna spirit, as well as a study on how the famous Finnish illustrator Mauri Kunnas has visualized Finnish myths.

Other articles and journals were plentiful, but most of them were quite loosely related to my subject. Worthy of mentioning is Seppo Knuuttila, who has written an article "Kalevala, myths and visual arts", which looks at some visual and verbal combinations of myths in Kalevala.

"Was Väinämöinen a wise man, a water spirit or a hero? The tradition of different regions, as well as the different genres, respond to this in different ways." (Siikala, 2018, p.48).

Lastly, I found especially helpful Matti Kamppinen's and Pasi Enges's article on the visuality of oral tradition. They discuss at length the visual representations of myths as well as point out structures, which they see needed for successfully interpreting myths. According to them, a visual myth interpretation's "success criterion is how well it increases or systematises understanding". I will discuss this more later on in chapter 5, as my view differs from said rules.

Interestingly, I found two thesis works, whose authors name quite the same reasons for their research as I have had for mine. Heikkanen (2018, p.10) notes that "The Kalevala seemed to me to be a very scoured subject. There are many different versions of our national epic, for example Mauri Kunnas's Dog Kalevala and Petri Hiltunen's Väinämöinen comics. Therefore, I do not seek any special inspiration from the Kalevala".[14] Kukkola (2016, p.6) writes: "I want to emphasize that with every country proud of its history, we too should cherish ours because no one else will do it for our small nation. It is puzzling that the average Finn knows more about the beliefs of ancient Greece than the myths of his own people." I quite agree with these notions, which already in the beginning of my project led me to search for Finnish myths which are lesser known.

4.2. Review of visual reference material

In my search for illustrations and images of the Finnish mythical beings I've tried to be as thorough as possible, while noting that the material is very scattered. I have searched through the archives of Finnish Literature Society, Finnish National Archives, Helsinki University library's department of folklore, Aalto University library and databases, as well as numerous websites, research databases and image databases, e.g. europeana.eu, creative commons, Flickr, Pinterest and Instagram. The latter ones proved useful in finding modern interpretations on some of the myths.

When searching through the art collections of, for example, the Europeana collections (www.europeana.eu), I found out about numerous images visualizing Kalevala even by foreign artists. There are documented sketches, sculptures, paintings, wall decorations and so on. Generally, the artwork in the databases about Finnish

myths and Kalevala tend to date back from the end of the 1800s to mid 1900s. Many of the artworks aim for realism and were likely created to support nationalistic ideologies.

Most of the illustrations of the lesser known mythical beings I found in Finnish libraries. I visited libraries in three cities, Helsinki, Oulu and Mikkeli, as well as the previously mentioned University libraries. The books that I found were mostly non-fiction books about myths aimed for children.

4.2.1. Illustrated books about Finnish mythical beings

I will next shortly introduce some of the illustrated books about Finnish myths which I found during and after creating my own artworks. As it was quite difficult to find all of these children's books from the various libraries, I hope this introduction can be of help to someone who will later study the same subject. It is likely though, that that the list is missing some publications.

One of the best-known books loosely about Finnish myths is Suomalainen tonttukirja (1979), a book of elves which was the debut work of Mauri Kunnas. The book mentions mythical beings like näkki, hiisi, menninkäinen and liekkiö, but focuses on the myths about tontut, the elves. (Kukkola, 2016). Mauri Kunnas has illustrated the Finnish culture for children more than anyone else.

Fig 9. Hiisi. Landström, Björn. (1985, p. 83).

Heikki Eklöf has also illustrated various kinds of "tonttu" in Tonttujen suuri suku (2019), and in general there is no shortage of tonttu books as it is the most well-known mythical being in Finland.

As was expected, I found various books on water and land spirits, but I was surprised to find even a book on Lintukotolaiset. Terttu Kaivola's Lintukotolaiset is illustrated by Pekka Vuori (SKS 1985). The illustrations in this book are so far the only illustrations I found of Lintukotolaiset, the beings which, in Finnish folklore, live at the end of the world. Vuori has previously illustrated also a book about giants in Finnish folktales.

Water spirits were illustrated in several books. Maileena Kurkinen, for one, has illustrated water spirits in Vedenhaltijat (1988). The book contains various illustrations of water spirits in Finnish folklore. Another book about them is Marjut Hjelt's and Crister Nuutinen's book Veden valtiaat (2012), a collection of myths about water spirits around the world. Finnish water spirits are included and all of them are illustrated as somewhat human-like.

I noticed Nuutinen had also illustrated a selkie, which is a seal-like mythical creature in the stories of Scotland, Iceland, Ireland and Faeroes. I had heard of them before, but only after seeing Nuutinen's illustration I made the connection to my own painted version of Ahti, and the stories my illustration was based on. Maybe the stories about the selkies at some point got mixed with the stories about Ahti and other water spirits in Finland, or maybe they originated separately, as seals have been important to hunters all around Scandinavia.

Hjelt and Nuutinen have also created another book, Maanväki (2014). The book illustrates and shortly introduces various earth and forest related mythical entities from all around the world. Many of the Finnish forest spirits are included.

Marjatta Levanto and Julia Vuori introduce all kinds of Finnish myths and mythical beings in their children's book Metsän pieni kansa, loosely translated as Small folk of the forest. The book seems like a collection of artworks about Finnish nature and mentality, and Vuori's illustrated characters keep the small readers interested.

Elina and Maija Ranta's book Haltijoitten mailla, maahisten majoissa (1996) is a collection of beautiful artworks and all sorts of magical spells and explanations of various Finnish sprites. The illustrator has even illustrated different versions of, for example, Näkki and Ahti.

Finnish beings are also often mentioned in collections of folklore around the world. One book like this is, for example, Beasts! (2008), curated by Jacob Covey. The book contains illustrations of Iku-Turso, Näkki Hiisi and Ajattar.

Sirkku Linnea has illustrated various Finnish mythical beings in Eero Ojanen's Suomalaiset taruolennot. (2017). For example, Pellonpekko and Ägräs were not illustrated in any of the books I found except in the one illustrated by Sirkku Linnea in 2017. I asked Linnea

Fig 10. Maahinen. Aalto, Jaana. (Taikametsä, 2000, p.79).

Fig 11. Maahinen. Linnea, Sirkku. (2017, p. 29).

Fig 12. Maahinen. Egerkrans, Johan. (2014, p. 72).

to describe the project to me and I will talk more about it in chapter 6 - Visual development of the illustrations.

Some older illustrations of Finnish myths are created by two legendary illustrators, Martta Wendelin and Rudolf Koivu. For example, Raul Roine's Satuja (WSOY 1990), is a well-known classic illustrated by Rudolf Koivu. The tales in the book are not necessarily Finnish, but the book contains several illustrations of "tonttu". According to an article by Kolu, (2018), "Swan's collection of Finnish fairy tales (illustrated by Rudolf Koivu and Martta Wendelin, published in 1933) contains many tales about the relationship between humans and water spirits."

Kolu also mentions some more books which have taken inspiration from Finnish folklore, but which I personally was not able to find. These books were Laura Soinne's collection of fairy tales (illustrated by Maija-Kaarina Nenonen and published 1946), Satu meni saunaan, satuja ja tarinoita, (1959), and Jarno Pennanen's Kulunut kultaviitta, (illustrated by Onni Mansnerus, WSOY 2007). Other authors mentioned include Eeva Tikka's Yön lintu ja Siivetön, (1989), Tikka's Majatalo Pimeä Kuu, (1994), and Anna-Liisa Haakana's Järventekijä ja vedenväki, (2001). (Kolu, Virikkeitä 4/2018).

What I noticed in general about the illustrations in the book was that in several of them the various creatures were mixed together. Especially maahinen, menninkäinen, keiju and hiisi were often either mixed together or interpreted similarly to other European myths. For example, menninkäinen and keiju used to mean, according to some stories, smelly, headless spirits from the Underworld. In the modern times, menninkäinen is thought of as similar to maahinen, or a forest spirit, and keiju is equivalent to the small, butterfly-like fairies which are known internationally.

When searching for the images it became apparent that many of the illustrations were not based on much reference material, but on subjective imagination. The artists had used their artistic freedom to interpret the mythical beings how they personally imagined them. This finding made sense to me. By this time, I had learned that the myths kept changing, and there was little sense in trying to create a more "correct" or "accurate" illustration than some other visual interpretation.

4.2.2. Illustrated comics about Finnish mythical beings

While I found various myth illustrations in the books, it is noteworthy that there are also various comic works about Finnish myths. Many of the comics I found were published as free online comics, while some were published as albums. I will introduce here the ones I was able to find.

Out of the online publications, probably the most famous one would be Minna Sundberg's Stand Still, Stay Silent, which is according to the author "a post-apocalyptic webcomic with elements from Nordic mythology, set 90 years in the future." Sundberg combines various elements of Finnish myths in the story, twisting them to fit the futuristic storyline. She also adds separate pages to explain various beliefs and elements of the myths which are mentioned in the story.

Anni K. is an author of an online comic The Witch Door. She has included in her comic the mythical place Lintukoto. Her description of it is "a magical island where birds migrate to and where spirits go after death", and it's not far from how the Lintukoto has been thought of in Finland in the past.

Fig 13. Ägräs. Linnea, Sirkku. (2017, p.88).

Fig 14. Pellon Pekko. Linnea, Sirkku. (2017, p.92).

The creator of Riverbound, who goes only by the name "ered", has also used Finnish myths as an inspiration for her narrative. Some of the characters include Tuoni and Tuonen tytti, as well as Kave, Para and such, which are all beings mentioned in Finnish myths. She describes her comic as "fantasy adventure, drawing inspiration from the mythology of my homeland, Finland."

Fig 15. Stand Still Stay Silent. Sundberg, Minna. (2013-).
www.deviantart.com/minnasundberg/art/Camp-Visitor-774894851

Some comic albums I found included Mari Ahokoivu's Oksi (2018) and Hukkanen's and Aula's Metsänpeitto (2018). Oksi is based on the myths about the bear and Metsänpeitto contains short stories about Finnish forest folklore. Petri Hiltunen, Kristian Huitula and other Finnish comic artists also published in 2015 an album based on Eino Leino's poems, and it contains various illustrations of mythical beings. Sara Valta has published a comic about the myth of Lempo (Jos mun tuttuni tulisi, 2016).

I discussed folklore illustrations with Valta in September 2019 and according to her, the most popular subjects in comics about Finnish mythology are either Kalevala or the bear mythology. Despite this, I got the feeling of Finnish mythical comics that the authors had a looser touch on interpreting the myths.

While book illustrators' creativity may possibly be restrained by book publishers and authors, the comic artists are freer to interpret the myths how they want. They are able to publish their works on free platforms and often have full control of their art. They can choose to modify the myths to fit the needs of their narratives, or to simply use some bits and pieces of different myths.

Personally, I felt encouraged by how the Finnish comic artists had made the myths their own and interpreted them diversely. In the end, I believe the mythical comic narratives had a bigger impact on my personal illustrations than the book illustrations I found on the myths.

4.3. How the research material steered the project to a new direction

When I began my research, I thought it was strange how few illustrations there were about Finnish myths. I also made a notion, that the illustrations I found were somehow extensions of each other and resembled other international myth illustrations. This was my subjective idea of the situation. On the other hand, when I thought some visualizations seemed specifically Finnish, I often did not like them. It was not clear to me what I was looking for, but I felt like there was a lot of room for more varying visual interpretations of Finnish myths.

I wondered about the international influence and what would make the visualizations of the myths original to Finland. When I thought of Central American or Japanese myths, I had a certain visual style in my mind. When thinking about Finnish myths, I mostly thought of black and white images or Gallen-Kallela's interpretations of Kalevala. I wondered, if my idea of the myths was similar to how other Finns viewed them, and could our myths be visualized somehow differently. Who even had the right to decide, how any myths should be visualized?

Inspired by other comic artists, I wanted to write and illustrate a whole new story about the Finnish myths and write my thesis around that. That proved to be a way too big of a task on top of the research I needed to do. I readjusted and decided to make new visual interpretations of the mythical beings which I could not find visual representations of. Later on, I was able to find visualizations of most of them though, and I also changed my myth choices as I learned more about my topic.

An important decision I made was that I wanted to first research the myths and then create my own interpretations, and only lastly find the visualizations other illustrators had created. I hoped this would help me to make the interpretations my own, instead of remakes of someone else's visions.

Fig 16. Hiisi. Hickey, Lizz. (Beasts! 2008, p. 63).

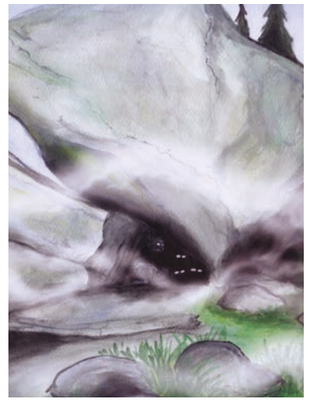

Fig 17. Hiisi. Jokinen, Ari. (2007, p. 39).

Fig 18. Hiisi. Linnea, Sirkku (2017, p. 128).

Fig 19. Hiisi. Hiltunen, Petri. (Eino Leinon Helkavirsiä, 2015, p. 7).

Fig 20. Hiidet. Aalto, Jaana. (Taikametsä, 2000, p. 76).

Fig 21. Hiidet. Landström, Björn. (Kalevala, 1985, p. 113).

Chapter 5:
Interpreting myths and folklore

When I was looking for visualizations of the Finnish mythical beings in the books and comics, I soon noticed how many of the beings resembled each other in the illustrations. I wondered why the illustrations of the spirits and beings were so similar to each other, and whether the artistic choices were based on reference material or not. A probable option was that the illustrations were artistic interpretations and only loosely based on research. As a professional illustrator I know the illustration projects are often tight on schedule and there is rarely time for plenty of background research.

Often the background research seems to be done by the author, who then gives the illustrator instructions for the visualizations. I believe that if the illustrators themselves did more background research themselves, it might add variety to the interpretations. For example, in the illustrated non-fiction books Pellon pekko is often visualized as a human-like elf with pointy ears, while in the books written on Finnish folklore it is mentioned that Pellon pekko can be described as a "mushroom", a "white rabbit" or "shaped like a seed". The books also explain where these descriptions may originate from, and the illustrator can then make a choice what they decide to include in their illustration.

There is no single answer as to how folklore can or should be visually interpreted. There are somewhat opposing opinions on the subject though. In this chapter, I will discuss some aspects of the interpretation process as well as the problems and possibilities of it. Lastly, I will explore the possibilities of personal imagination in visualizing myths and folklore.

5.1 On visual interpretations of myths

During the process of this thesis my advisor asked me whether I aim to interpret the myths how they were seen in the past, or how I personally see them. This is an important question for anyone visualizing myths. Whose view is the illustrator attempting to create; their own or someone else's?

If the illustrator wishes to understand how the beings were thought of in the ancient times, it is necessary to read plenty of research material and to try to understand the world view of the people who lived back then. On the other hand, if the approach is more subjective, the references can also be thought of as simply source material and the outcome will be more of an artistic interpretation.

The time we live in as well as our social environment constantly affect how we interpret what we see, and it is challenging if not impossible to try to ignore it. Siikala (2012, p.20) discusses the frameworks and social context of interpreting myths in her book Itämeren-suomalaisten mytologia. "As culture regenerates, old themes take on new historical forms. They are interpreted within the context of each cultural framework to fit the social context and current world view." I paid attention to this at many points of my research. I often noticed how my own subjective worldview and modern thought patterns came in the way as I tried to understand how some mythical being might have been understood in ancient times.

Siikala continues: "-- mythology is characterized by the conservatism of the central structures, even the essential elements, themes and images, and the constant re-interpretation of these structures and materials." (Siikala, 2012, p.20). By this, I believe, she partly means that we constantly re-interpret the myths as the society around us changes and develops.

Kamppinen and Enges (1994) discuss the visuality of the Finnish oral tradition in their article Kuvista teksteihin, teksteistä kuviin: suullisen perinteen visuaalisuudesta (From images to texts, from texts to images: on the visuality of the oral tradition). They point out that interpreting mythical images, descriptions and their meanings is like a detective job, where the researcher, who doesn't understand the context and the ancient worldview, tries to make material understandable by weaving a network of meanings between its various parts. "The shared cultural systems aof the traditional community make the mere mention of the special coloring of cows, for example, sufficient to evoke a supernormal creature that cares for cattle."

Fig 22. Forest spirit. Westin, Miila. (2019).

It is noteworthy, that while doing background research, the illustrators need to pay attention to the complexities of the research material on myths. Western thinking doesn't effortlessly fit into studying indigenous religions. "Quite a large part of the concept of religious research stems from our scientific understanding of the world. In cultures where people feel they are living with spirits, the spirits are not thought to be supernatural. They are natural, normal, and their actions are "something that happens." (Siikala, 2012, p. 77). This has been the case in Finland. Spirits were believed to be part of the world around us, and mythical beings lived side by side humans, both respecting each other. The western researchers of the old myths may not have always been able to comprehend all the aspects of what they have learned and have misunderstood the myths at times.

When interpreting myths, it is important to maintain awareness that interpretations are always based on one's culture and values. There is nothing wrong in doing that and it is a part of creating art but noticing it can help someone remove unwanted biases.

The ancient stories, images and their meanings may be difficult to understand, but possibly also to accept. Depending on the time and the society we live in, it can be difficult for us to accept how differently people in the old times may have thought and behaved, and it is at times hard to be objective about it. It is impossible to know what really may have been left out from the research or interpreted in a socially acceptable way.

According to Siikala, the meanings of mythical images flow from the cultural interpretation process. As our values and thought patterns change, we are able to see new aspects in the ancient stories and images. For example, when the Finnish myths were collected, it was important to re-tell them as a heroic story. If Kalevala were written today, various aspects of the story might be altered to fit the values and views of today's audience.

This is key, since if mythical images are constantly re-interpreted and re-created in different times, how could we ever know where they originated from, what the original myth was, or what story is more original than the other? The re-interpreted myths also move and wander, intertwine with other myths and continue on. According to Siikala, "the basic images of mythical expression are repetitive - if not universal - in different cultures, and are constantly evolving, producing new metaphors and thus taking on many forms within the same community." (Siikala, 2012, p. 64-65).

Although, in general, interpretations keep changing and taking new forms, there are also demands for cultural and visual constraints. Kamppinen and Enges (1994) highlight important aspects of visualizing myths and use geometry as an example: while similar objects do not need to be geometrically similar, one object can serve as a model or a recipe for another. Although the recipe does not have to be visually similar to the product, the recipe can serve as a set of instructions and rules by which the product is made.

A more concrete example would be their example of the mythical being Maahinen. While there are no ancient visualizations about Maahinen, there are, though, oral and written descriptions. These descriptions serve as a recipe for the illustrations. Although, what happens when the various recipes contradict one another, or are clearly from different time periods?

Kamppinen and Enges note, that some parts and details of the myths are essential to the narrative while others are not and can thus be omitted or replaced. According to them, stories from the same community, collected at the same time, even by the same

narrator, are often fragmented and contradictory.

Kamppinen and Enges also point out that reproductions of myths are always a blend of choices. They mention four relevant aspects an illustrator should take into account when creating an interpretation of myths based on research material.

They firstly emphasize that any reproduction always consists of choices about what elements are included in the reproduction of a story or a visualization, and what are left out.

Secondly, they point out that an individual text or image may contain various elements and meanings which may not open to the researcher unless it is placed as part of a bigger picture.

Thirdly, human errors are always present. "In particular, in the case of old handwritten material, the deletion of details due to the recording technique must be borne in mind." (Kamppinen & Enges, 1994).

Fourthly, the researcher is confronted with the same problem of interpretation as in other cultural studies. "Interpretation, by its very nature, is never perfect, and there is no direct access to the actual images of the traditional community that people put into words in the texts." (Kamppinen & Enges, 1994).

In the end, the cultural and visual constraints are not as limiting as one might think at first. They also can't be, because so much cultural knowledge has disappeared over time.

5.2. The challenges of various versions of the myths

I will here give an example of how difficult it can be to do background research on mythical beings and the many versions of them. I discuss shortly the problems of illustrating Finnish mythical beings Tapio and Kuippana. The original Finnish language in the example is old, and the names are written in their old forms.

According to Martti Haavio, the dean of Leppävirta, Alopaeus, noted in 1767: Rongötäus was worshipped for rye growth, Äckräs gave turnips, Achti fish, Tapio all kinds of forest game but Kuiktilassi hares. After this, Kuiktilassi is never again met in folk poetry or other early literature. (Haavio, 1967, p. 79).

It is thought that Kuiktilassi may be the same as Kuippana. Ganander explained, that Kuippana is "a man of the forest, a tall and terrible being, who has a grey beard. Kuippana drove foxes and hares into traps and straps. —— He resembles — a son, a troll, and a giant who inherited his size, power, and cruelty from his father." We also know a bird called Kuippana. (Haavio, 1967, p. 79).

Folklore researchers Kaarle Krohn and Uno Harva both presumed that the hare giver Kuiktilassi was originally one of the names of the forest king, who gave hunting fortune and catch. (Haavio, 1967) Haavio thinks the name may originate from the words denoting the fate and deliciousness of meat. (Haavio, 1967)

Haavio states that the Finnish hunter has spoken to the forest king, the "divider of destinies" using different names: Tapio, Tapiotar, Osatyttö, Fortune of the forest, Laus, Mielu, Mielikki, Lyyõikki, Kuippana, Palvonen, Pajainen, etc. Each of these names has a different background, but they all mean the same thing. (Haavio, 1967)

Based on these assumptions, Kuiktilassi/Kuippana may be an emuu (species mother spirit) of hares, or another name for Tapio, the forest itself. We simply don't know, since there is no documentation of this being. In the end, I illustrated Kuippana as an emuu of hares, and Tapio as the forest king. This was a personal choice, and naturally another illustrator can choose to illustrate them completely differently.

Nevertheless, such a mess of theories and assumptions awaits the illustrator of Finnish myths. I would like to emphasize that the illustrator of myths participates in a long folklore continuum and brings his or her own artistic perspective to it.

Fig 23. Forest spirit. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 24. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2018).

5.3. The ever-changing versions of the myths and using them as inspiration

There are many reasons why it is worthwhile to create new and varying versions of myths. Myths themselves change so much that there can be no 'correct' version of the folklore for new generations. Following that, there is no need to be afraid of doing something wrong or creating the wrong kind of illustration. In any case, all of the different variations are in some way subjective.

New interpretations also build on older versions. A good example would be the internationally popular subject of illustrations: the slender and beautiful fairies with wings. "The wings of the fairy first appeared in the 18th century, when the poem by Alexander Pope, The Rape of the Lock, was illustrated. Since then, in the 19th century, the golden age of fairy art, the image of fairies with wings became more common, and nowadays wings are an integral part of a fairy in people's minds, a downright defining feature. In folktales fairies may have been able to fly before, but without wings, using magic spells or riding along a plant like a witch." (Puumalainen, 2017, p.17-18).

Some argue that the visualizations of myths should increase the knowledge of them, not just freely interpret them. As Siikala phrases it, "the nature of mythical discourse determines the potential for reproducing tradition and adapting it to new contexts, or contextualization." (Siikala, 2012, p.65). Kamppinen and Enges (1994) emphasize that the myth interpretation process' success can be evaluated by how well it increases or systematises understanding. I slightly disagree especially after laboriously seeking for information on my mythical subjects and failing in some sense. The purpose of the interpretation is not only to increase understanding, but an interpretation of a myth is successful even if it, for example, visualizes the subject in a controversial or uncommon way.

5.4. Intertwining myths and imagination

Personally, I believe every myth illustrator can freely create their own interpretations of the myths. They should try to find a fresh way to express the old stories and discover new creative angles. This way the myths continue to evolve, and the old stories and characters can be continuously discovered by new audiences.

Still, fresh interpretations of Finnish myths have not been treated very favorably in the past. "During the cultural history of Kalevala, numerous interpretations and views presented have been excluded from the academical research and rejected from national discussion. This concern, for example, the question of the meaning of "alternative" Kalevalas that pop up on the market every now and then. Perhaps this is a good time to take a calm look at the interpretative cavalcade of Kalevala and contemplate where the boundaries of different interpretations lay at a given time." (Knuuttila, 2009, p.425).

Fig 25. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2019).

In 2009 Kalevalaseura published a new version of Kalevala which was visualized by various artists. Instead of simply illustrating the characters in the poems, "all the artists were presented with the question of what do certain poems of Kalevala evoke in their minds, what they would consider to be their essence, and how they would prefer to interpret it in their work." (Knuuttila, 2009, p.421). This was very open-minded and gave the artists free hands with their interpretations.

I will introduce one example from the book. As Knuuttila describes, "in the painting by Katja Tukiainen,

Fig 26. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2018).

Lemminkäinen has been portrayed quite unusually compared to earlier paintings. --- Lemminkäinen is shown in the lower part of the work, wearing a zorro mask, with a rabbit tattoo on his chest. The bird women, siren characters sitting on tree branches, blow bubblegum bubbles." (Knuuttila, 2009, p. 423).

This is a great example of how an artist combines his or her work with an existing tradition and brings a new perspective to it. It is also something I wish I would see more. Instead, it feels like many artists want to follow the already set path and create something that is immediately recognizable. An elf with pointy ears is immediately recognized as an elf, and some would possibly argue that it is the only way to visualize an elf.

During the process of my research I had several discussions with people about visualizing myths and folklore. One of the discussions was about unicorns and how they should be illustrated. In my perspective everyone can create their own version of a unicorn and if to them personally the illustration is of a unicorn, then it is. One of my discussion partners argued that unicorns must look "like they always have", by which he meant white horses with one long horn on their forehead. I looked into it and found all kinds of ugly and beautiful unicorns; some looked more like hippos, some like goats, others resembled dragons.

To me it is clear that those are all illustrations of unicorns in their own right as they are simply interpretations of how someone has imagined the unicorn. I imagine some people would argue that by taking artistic liberties the artists are somehow doing injustice to the so-called original myths. To them, the elf must have pointy ears, the fairy must have wings and the unicorn looks like a horse. There is no right or wrong answer in this, but perhaps that kind of black-and-white thinking has been learned from somewhere. Knuuttila (2009, p. 425) analyzes that "we are linked to the traditions we are born and grown into, and to which we thereby belong, by the structures, lengthy durations and slow movements of culture." I believe that if we learn to see variation in visualizations of different subjects, we grow to accept and like it. This is especially important in children's' illustrations, which I will talk more about in chapter 6.

Fig 27. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2018).

5.5. From myths to something completely new

Myths and folklore have always been used as inspiration for modern narratives and it is one way of keeping them alive. I personally like it, if the interpretation of a myth has an entirely new angle to the subject, or various myths are combined together in an interesting way.

My favourite example of combining myths together in a creative manner is Hayao Miyazaki's movie Spirited Away (2001, original title Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi). Foster (2015) gives an example of how in 2005 he was asked to give a lecture about the Japanese animated movie Spirited Away. He was to explain the folklore used in the movie. To his surprise, although the movie was packed full of demons, deities, spirits and all kinds of folklore, he couldn't find the reference sources. Foster continues, that the film makers were clearly influenced by Japanese and European folklore, but they did not directly reference any specific tales. Instead they "seemed a skilful cobbling together of many". The film is by no means a retelling of traditional narratives. "At the same time, however, it isn't entirely 'fictional' or invented from scratch," Foster explains. (Foster, & Tolbert, 2015, p. 3).

What needs to be noted about Miyazaki's folklore references is that he doesn't stick to them. He uses them to create characters of his own. An example of this could be Kamaji, the boiler man in the movie Spirited Away. He is an original character but based on a demon creature in Japanese folklore called Tsuchigumo. "These giant spider-like creatures are often depicted with the face of an oni (evil spirit). They can also change their appearance to human-like to deceive their prey or alter their size similar to the way Kamaji can elongate his arms." (StoryDive. 2019, Nov 16). In this way, fragments of stories can be used in visualizing old myths and narratives, while at the same time completely new characters and narratives are created.

I have for a long time been inspired by this type of combination of myths and modern narrative. In fact, at the beginning of this project, my plan was to write and illustrate my own visual narrative about the Finnish myths. I will write more on this in the next chapter, where I talk about the development of the illustrations and my personal artistic process.

Fig 28. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2018).

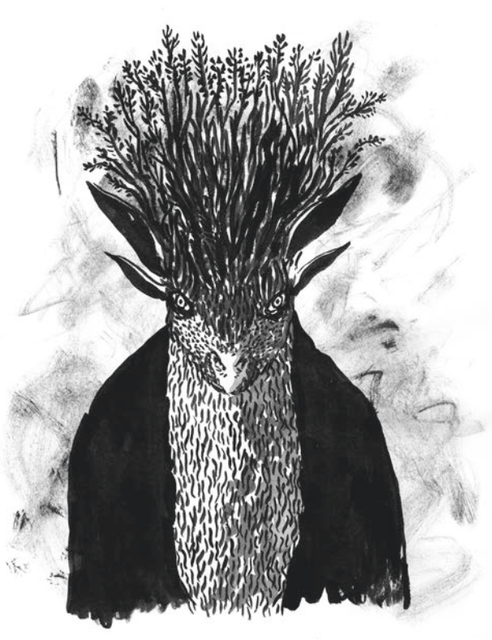

Fig 29. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2018).

Fig 30. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2018).

Chapter 6:

Thought process behind the visual choises

In this chapter I will dive into the pre-production of the artworks of this thesis. I will analyse the decisions I made before creating the artworks and write about what I was inspired by and reflect my choices with some basic concepts in character design. In chapter 7 I will finally introduce the mythical beings I chose to illustrate, the research findings on them as well as the final illustrations I created.

6.1. The first choices of audience and style

Soon after beginning the research on the thesis I realized how little I had known about my subject. As a storytelling student my initial plan for the practice-based thesis had been to write and illustrate a visual narrative. This soon turned out to be too large-scale, as there was such a vast amount of material to read as background research. I decided to narrow down the project and illustrate six Finnish mythical beings which I could later on introduce as characters in a visual narrative. Eventually I illustrated 18 characters.

In the Finnish mythology I am particularly interested in the lesser known mythical beings. I have been intrigued by the strange characters who have clearly been important in their time, but who we no longer remember. In my research, I decided to explore these mythical creatures and to create my own visual interpretations of them. My aim was to include these characters in a visual narrative later on.

I decided to write the visual narrative for children, which naturally meant I would have to make the illustrations for children as well. Through this narrative I wished to introduce Finnish myths to children in Finland and abroad. I wanted to create modern and colourful illustrations of Finnish myths despite the fact that in the ancient times life was rather dark and ruthless and this is often shown in illustrations of myths. However, I wanted to approach my subject from a different direction.

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, I have come to the conclusion that it is up to the artists themselves how they wish to interpret myths. Whether they wish to visualize the myths how they imagine someone in the ancient times has viewed the subject, or if they choose to make an interpretation from their personal point of view, that is up to them. After all, the end result will in any case be at least partially a subjective interpretation.

In terms of my project's purposes - bringing old Finnish narratives and spiritual beings more approachable to our modern younger audiences - I decided to interpret the spirits with a very subjective approach. By

Fig 31. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2018).

Fig 32. Narrative sketch. Westin, Miila. (2018).

this I mean that instead of attempting to create something that could be commonly recognizable and conventional, I wanted to experiment on how I personally envisioned our myths and the characters in them. How people probably thought of these creatures in the past or how people now imagine them is likely quite different than how I interpreted them. My aim in this project was to create my own interpretation, not to try to look into someone else's head.

I wanted to create illustrations which would be a part of a greater body of my personal work instead of a separate, stylistically different project. This led me to think more deeply about my own artistic practise, the traditional and digital tools I tend to use, and the subjects and themes in my artworks. I analysed the conscious as well as the subconscious reasonings behind my works and eventually I was able to find recognizable connecting elements in my works.

Fig 33. Nature studies. Westin, Miila. (2020).

A very time-consuming part of my decision-making process was the choice of style. As an illustrator, my artistic style is heavily influenced by Japanese culture, partly because a decade ago I lived in Japan for a while. During the thesis process I considered whether I wanted this Japanese influence to show in my illustrations of Finnish mythology, or if I wanted the illustrations to be visually more "Finnish". This raised some questions: what would Finnish illustration look like in 2020, and if I wished to create something more "Finnish", what would it mean?

Finnish design is known for taking inspiration from nature and for being minimalistic and timeless. The

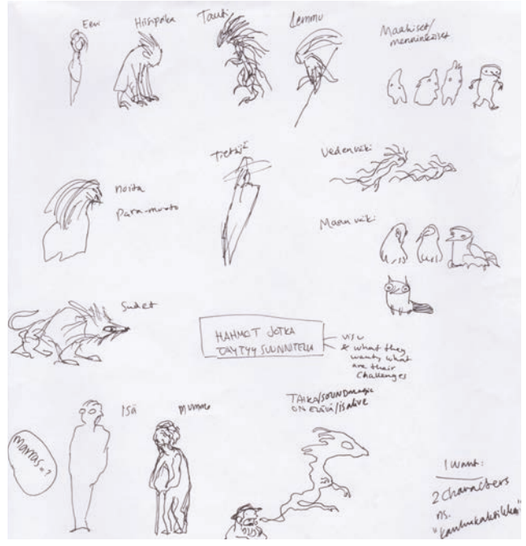

Fig 34. Planning the narrative. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Finnish textile designs are bold and use strong colours and contrasts. Well known Finnish illustrators also often use strong colors and pay attention to forms and shapes. What could be identified as a Finnish illustration style is not very decorative, but somewhat minimalistic. But was this necessarily something to take into account in my illustrations? Also, several famous Finnish illustrators such as Klaus Haapaniemi and Kustaa Saksi have knowingly steered away from the said minimalism. Their works are full of details and decorative elements.

As a result of globalization, I believe it is increasingly difficult to make a distinctions in artistic styles between countries. In the past, before the spreading of Internet, one could tell that certain children's books looked "Polish" and some comics "American", but nowadays the distinction is not as clear anymore. People work across borders, absorb influence and inspiration from all over the world and create artistic work that is a result of this blending process. An online comic which looks stylistically Japanese can be illustrated by a Brazilian or an American artist, and no one will give it a second thought. In this respect it seems unnecessary to attempt to twist my style for the sake of creating something more "Finnish".

On the other hand, applying cultural references to characters based on a certain country's mythology seems justified. What types of cultural references could I then use in my illustrations? In a study on using cultural references in designing characters for games Khalis (2017) sums up that "culture is part of human development which evolves with civilization from ancient times to today's digital era". (Khalis, 2017, p. 1). What in our culture is old enough and hasn't changed too much since the ancient times while the civilization has evolved?

My answer to these questions was Finnish na-

ture. Nature also changes of course, as we know well in the midst of the global climate change. But at the same time, it stands for something timeless. As mentioned, Finnish design is known for taking inspiration from nature, and nature is also a cultural glue which binds our country together. Finnish people have always appreciated their nature, the changing of the seasons, and we have respect for our nature's unpredictability.

Our relationship with nature is something which we can probably recognize in our myths. The forest gives us its berries and mushrooms but can also get us lost and be dangerous. The lakes and the sea provide fish, but also drown people every year. The environment which has inspired the stories about the beings in the forests and lakes is still present today.

Finnish birds, mushrooms, plants and animals as well as insects proved to be an interesting source of inspiration for my project. Especially the strange, colourful insects made it clearer to me why in the past people thought many of them to be spirits in the form of an insect.

6.2. The pressure of an exhibition and being unable to draw

During the process of my thesis, the Finnish Illustrators Association chose me as one of the artists to create a solo exhibition at Galleria Kuvitus in the autumn of 2020. The theme of the exhibition was Finnish mythology and I was to show there the artworks created for this thesis, as my thesis was scheduled to be finished a few months before the exhibition.

Preparing for the exhibition influenced my thesis project, because I started to question my artwork more than ever before. Knowing my illustrations would be shown to a wide audience - and especially to my colleagues - added pressure on me, and my ambitions for the final illustrations became overwhelming. After a couple of months of trying to create art for a thesis as well as for the exhibition I came to a conclusion that it was best to separate the projects. Finishing the thesis was my first priority, and after returning the thesis I thought I would still have a few months to concentrate on the exhibition pieces. Making this decision took off a lot of the pressure I had built on myself. Eventually the exhibition did become a part of this thesis, but at that point leaving it out was the right choice to make.

All in all, the thesis process turned out to be an artistic style experiment. I tested out gouache colours as well as learned to paint with iPad and Procreate. I did several experiments with brushes in Photoshop and watched countless tutorials on using various tools. I experimented on digital and traditional brushes and created probably close to a hundred sketches and illustrations which I later discarded. Either the sketches were too scary for children or too static, or I simply had a bad moment.

I wonder if every artist is the same, but I am not able to draw at any given moment. Most of the time my sketches and drawings look absolutely terrible and have no life in them, at least not in my eyes. It simply feels like I don't remember how to hold a pencil anymore.

At other times though, I may simply wake up in the morning, pick up a pencil and draw the perfect sketch before breakfast. By this I don't mean artists should wait for inspiration, though, as usually inspiration finds you when you are working. Still, there is a moment when you are definitely allowed to quit after a few tries and to decide it is simply not a good moment to draw and return to it later.

The sketches and my experiments with the tools eventually helped me find out which working methods I preferred, and which ones I was not interested in. Sketching a lot helped with discovering a certain style which I was able to implement with both traditional and digital tools.

6.3. Designing the characters

I planned on using the characters of the thesis artworks later on in a narrative on Finnish myths. When designing multiple characters for a narrative, the first decisions have to do with the shape and size of the characters, as well as with variation. If all of the characters are too similar, it may be difficult to distinguish them from each other.

Fig 35. Sketch 1 of Vetehinen. Westin, Miila. (2018).

Fig 36. Sketch 2 of Vetehinen. Westin, Miila. (2018).

As Nikolaeva (2017) puts is, square shapes represent stability and heaviness, safeness and softness is associated with oval shaped characters and angular and pointy shapes project danger and are often used in villainous characters. "The variations are endless. Strong, powerful character (square), but also mean (triangle) or big hero (square), but soft at heart (circle)." (Nikolaeva, 2017).

In addition to shapes, character designers love to play with proportions. It is common to give childrens' characters big head and eyes to make them look cute. Setting the eyes far apart from each other adds cuteness points. Still, the face of the character may play a rather small role. "David Colman, an Emmy winning character designer found in his practice and researches, that facial expression is really secondary when reading a character. First thing to notice is the face shape, posture and body language (not so much shape of eyes, eyebrows, mimic, etc). (Nikolaeva, 2017). The character's silhouette and body language play a bigger role in communicating the characters personality and feelings than the facial expressions.

When designing the characters for my visual narrative, I noticed that I intuitively used very soft and round shapes in my sketches. I have certain mannerisms while I draw, which make sketching quick but also in a sense a "thoughtless" process. Of course I think while drawing, but the thinking process is very subconscious. If I go back to the sketch, I may be able to identify the choices I've made while drawing, but some of it is always a bit of a mystery to myself as well.

If there is a blank paper and I begin to draw on it, I don't necessarily have any kind of outcome in my mind. During the process of this thesis I attempted to pay more attention to the choices I made while drawing, but some of them were inexplicable even to myself. Why does Sämpsä's head resemble the head of a lizard, or why Hongatar doesn't have hands and feet in the gouache painting? These were some of the side questions I presented to myself but could not answer.

The choices I made about colours were completely based on personal preferences. I simply like various combinations of green and pink and wanted to play with different shades. In the books I read about the Finnish spirits, it was sometimes mentioned that Pellonpekko was seen as a white rabbit or a mushroom, and blueness was associated with all kinds of forest spirits and beings of the "otherside". If I encountered mentions about the colours, I included them as well as I could. For this reason, hiisi, maahinen and Tapio, for example, are all blue in the gouache painting and Pellonpekko is white in the digital illustration.

I did, though, also make a green version of Maahinen and purple version of Pellonpekko, which was a bit of an accident. Towards the end of the project I began to

Fig 38. Testing gouache paints. Westin, Miila. (2019).

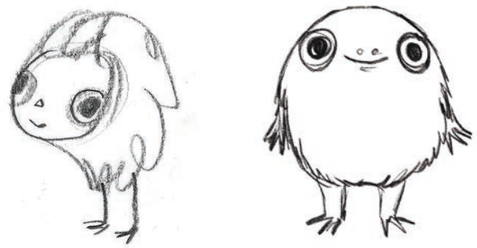

Fig 37. Sketches of Maahinen. Westin, Miila. (2019).

think of the characters as more "mine" than something mentioned in an ancient story, and did not think about the descriptions as much anymore.

With the colours I did not think about the meanings that colours have, such as the calmness of blue or the energy of yellow. It did come out naturally here and there, as I thought of Ägräs as something energetic and intuitively coloured him/her partly yellow. On the other hand, colours can be interpreted differently from culture to culture and it is difficult to know what kinds of associations ancient people had with certain colours. In addition, many of the colours I have used in my works have not been manufactured until the modern times.

When it comes to designing for children, colours play an important role. Colours impact the mood and can make people feel emotions. For this reason, the clothes of small children are often bright coloured and are meant to express positivity over negativity.

Something I wish to mention about the character design process is that my intention all along was to create non-human-like characters. The illustrations I found of Finnish mythical beings often visualized the spirits as human-like. In the reference material it was sometimes mentioned that some spirit looked like an old man with a long beard or like a woman with black hair, but at times it was even clearly mentioned that some did not look like humans at all.

Although in most visualizations of Finnish myths the beings resemble humans, I rather imagine them to look like strange creatures and entities. When creating a narrative for children, the choice of turning human-like characters into creatures such as dogs or cats can be easily justified. This is the case with, for example, the Dog Kalevala of Mauri Kunnas.

For me, the choice was not simply about creating the characters for children, but I really do personally imagine many of the spirits as beings which do not look like humans at all. Nevertheless, as I intended to create my characters suitable for a visual narrative for children, I wanted them also to look kind and approachable as well as to evoke positive emotions. I also needed the characters to be quite easy to re-draw, as I knew I would need to illustrate them many times. I will next talk more about the choices I made in regard to designing characters for children.

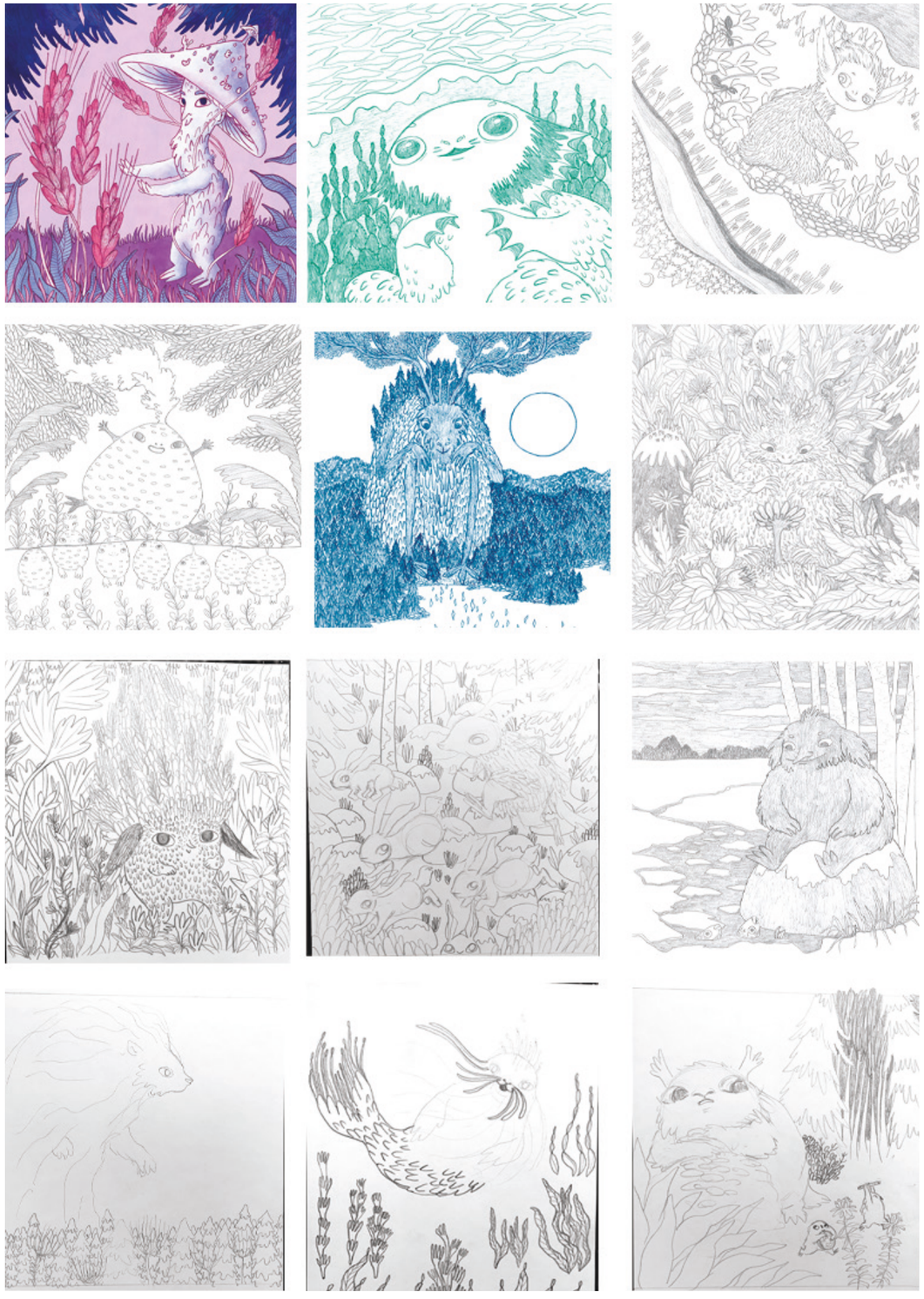

Fig 39. Sketches of the exhibition pieces. Westin, Miila. (2019).

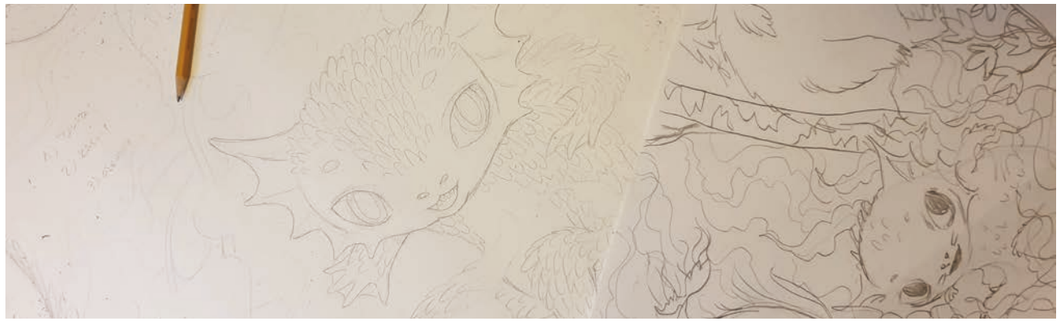

Fig 40. Transferring a smaller sketch to watercolour paper. Westin, Miila. (2019).

6.4. Illustrating for children and the problem of cuteness

Early on in the process I needed to decide who I was creating my characters for. I saw the outcome of the project as a collection of illustrated characters which I could later on use in various projects. The projects I have been planning are all aimed for children which is why I wanted the characters to be suitable for children.

To me, "suitable for children" meant illustrating characters which would be cute, funny, approachable and that they would express positive feelings. That naturally doesn't mean though, that any kinds of characters couldn't be loved in the popular culture.

One can also argue effectively against creating only cute characters for children and the popular mainstream culture aimed for children. Janet Evans writes in her book Challenging and Controversial Picturebooks: Creative and Critical Responses to Visual Texts: "Quite evidently —- responding to challenging and controversial picturebooks is not something that children are afraid of. It is more likely to be adults – parents, teachers and carers – who are unwilling, indeed incapable of making relevant, mature responses." (Evans, 2015, p. 44). According to her, there is a clear need for picture books which offer more to children than fantasy-like-escapism: "Making sense of how others think and feel is a complex cognitive activity, so awareness, self reflection and discussion are essential if an understanding of what is challenging and controversial in a picturebook both for ourselves and for others, is to be reached." (Evans, 2015, p. 27).

Martin C. Salisbury has examined the problem in an article in Bookbird, a journal of international children's literature. He mentions that well-established artists and authors are excused of the rules surrounding the children's book publishing industry, while newcomers are expected to stick to the rules of what 'can' be published. The rules are set by "the notorious chain of people that come between book and child: the marketing people, accounts people, sales people, bookshop managers, shop assistants and parents, all of whom have a say in what's 'appropriate' and what reaches the child's bookself." (Salisbury, 2012/2019).

Illustrator Ilona Partanen (2018) discusses the topic in her thesis: "although in the past years difficult topics have emerged as themes of children's literature, the adults still expect the visuals of the stories to contain cute big-eyed characters, bright colours and clear shapes." (Partanen, 2018, p. 17). The discussion around the subject made me wonder, where does this kind of expectation for cuteness in children's fictional characters come from?

According to a study by Nittono et al., "Cute objects are assumed to be characterized by baby schema. This is a set of features that are commonly seen in young animals: a large head relative to the body size, a high and protruding forehead, large eyes, and so forth." According to the study, "baby schema modulates perception and attention at early stages of visual processing and activates the reward system of the brain. From an ethological perspective, it is understandable that cute things are treated favorably." (Nittono, H., et al., 2012, p. 1).

In short, "Kawaii (a Japanese word meaning 'cute') things are popular because they produce positive feelings." (Nittono, H., et al., 2012, p. 1). These feelings can be used to create a whole marketing strategy. According to McVeigh (2007), characters can be created simply for the purpose of cuteness. Sanrio's marketing manager Bill Hensley explained that 'retail first' means having characters debut on products, rather than using characters who start their lives in books, comics strips, cartoons, or films and then move onto products. (Fox 1998). (McVeigh, 2007). This means, that the characters are created only for the purpose of selling, and the biggest selling point is their cuteness.

It is not a fundamentally bad thing to create something cute for the purposes of selling something. Marketing people use people's emotions daily in various ways to increase consuming, and cute products are only part of a genre of emotion-invoking sales strategies. Nevertheless, in the beginning of my thesis project I did not think of this aspect of the illustrations. I have always drawn cute creatures, but now I began to think whether there was more of a personal reason behind it, which I hadn't noticed. Maybe by creating something cute and approachable I was hoping for more people to like what I had created.

Nevertheless, while this topic would provide an opportunity for a more in-depth reflection and research, that is outside the focus of this research and I will leave out a deeper examination of it. In the end, the mythical beings for this thesis work are illustrated in my Japan-influenced colourful and cute style. Still, this subject certainly raised new thoughts about my own artistic practise and the choices I have so far made concerning it.

Chapter 7:
Visual development of the illustrations based on research material

7.1. The mythical beings I chose to illustrate

When deciding on which characters to illustrate for the purposes of my thesis, I collected a list of more than 80 Finnish mythical spirits and beings, which many I had never heard of. In the beginning, I wanted to illustrate spirits which had no earlier representations, but during my research I was able to find some visualizations of almost all of them. I had planned to focus on the potentially older myths about the forest spirits, but in the end decided to include spirits from the times of agriculture as well. This was because I was inspired to illustrate beings which I couldn't find satisfying illustrations of. By satisfying I mean that the illustrations I found did not represent my idea of the beings.

Even though myths are a larger shared understanding of something, to me they become interesting through a personal, subjective approach. For this reason, I wanted to look for mythical beings which inspired me and which I felt like I wanted to create my personal version of.

I finally chose three characters, which I had no idea what they could look like. I had never seen an illustration or description of them. These were Pellon Pekko, Sämpsä Pellervoinen and Ägräs. I also chose three more characters, which I knew of, but did not really have a visual idea of in my mind. These were Tapio, Hiisi and Maahinen. I knew I would definitely find some illustrations of these three beings, but I had never seen any which represented my idea of them.

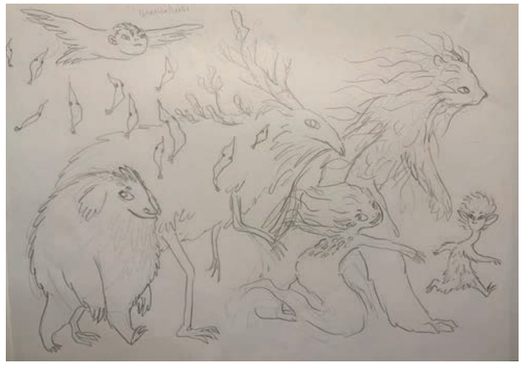

Fig 41. Forest spirits. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 42. Agricultural spirits. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Of these six beings, Ägräs, Pellon Pekko and Sämpsä Pellervoinen were worshipped until quite late, as they were spirits related to agriculture. According to Siikala (2018, p. 454-455), "-- Runkoteivas and Äkräs, perhaps Pellon pekko as well, were still worshipped in the 18th century in northern Savo. Sämpsä Pellervoinen, on the other hand, was involved in the promotion of agriculture in the cultural district of Savo in North Karelia and was still the subject of Ingrian rites in the late 19th century."

There are plenty of mentions of the spirits and I will next go through the information I was able to gather of them and how the findings affected my illustrations. I also include short mentions of the twelve beings which I illustrated for the exhibition but did not focus on in this project.

7.1.1. Character one: Sämpsä Pellervoinen – Spirit of the plants, who is woken up every spring

Out of all the Finnish mythical beings I found, Sämpsä turned out to be one of my favourites. Until now I did not know much about the being, although I had heard the name.

There are various versions of myths about Sämpsä Pellervoinen. One discussion about Sämpsä conserns whether Sämpsä's purpose was to grow forest or grains. Ganander assumed Sämpsä to be a spirit of

Fig 43. Sämpsä Pellervoinen. Westin, Miila. (2018).

forest growing but thought it to be obvious that the being was originally related to growing grain. He based this on the fact that it was the winter boy and the summer boy who called for Sämpsä to arrive, which refers to an annual phenomenon. (Harva, 1948). "Agricola does not mention Sämpsä in his list of gods in 1550, but mentions a creature called Köndös in relation to sowing ce-

Fig 44. First version of Sämpsä Pellervoinen, gouache paints. Westin, Miila. (2018).

Fig 45. Sämpsä Pellervoinen. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 46. Digital version of Sämpsä Pellervoinen. Westin, Miila. (2018).

real fields (“Köndös / Huchtat ia Pellot teki.”) Agricola’s Köndös could have been Sämpsä’s equivalent.” (Harva, 1948, p. 177).

Sämpsä is said to overwinter on a shallow lake and flee to the North. There are also mentions of Sämpsä having a marital relationship with his mother and of Sämpsä to arrive on a grain ship, on which he lives on with his mother. Harva would assume that the mother with whom Sämpä is in a relationship with, means the mother earth. “Only a plant, represented by the plant sprite, can be both the child of his mother and her fertilizer at the same time. This religious image is ancient to the peoples of the agricultural culture, and with the cultural flows it has arrived to us as well.” (Harva, 1948, p. 182).

When the poetry on Sämpsä and its activities became the subject of research, attention was, of course, also paid to the peculiar name of this spirit of vegetation. Explaining the name has been greatly aided by the fact that in the Eastern Finland and Inkeri the word sämpsä has remained as the name of a grass (Scirpus silvaticus) which grows early in the spring (“sämpsäheinä, sämpsänmätäs, sämpsykkä, sämpsykkäheinä ja sämpsykkäluhta”). (Harva, 1948,p. 183). This finding was actually the one which inspired me to imagine the sprite as a being covered in vegetation.

Comparative research has been important in researching about the spirits. Related to this is “Ämssänmätäs”, which has also been known among Finns in Vermland, where it is imagined as the spirit’s residence. It is the name of the first green grass tussock in the spring. (Harva, U. 1948). It is also mentioned, that Sämpsä derivative Sämpsykkä is a plant name in the poems of the Karelia. (Krohn, 1915, p.185). Krohn assumes that Sämpsä could be a word derived from its counterpart is the German semse, or simse, which means reed.

Harva believes he is able to reason, how the forest growing spirit became the grower of grains. “Probably what began as spring’s growth force and its annual revivalist, later became a great seed scatterer and was surrounded by an interesting web of international fables, which can be traced back thousands of years.” (Harva, 1948, p. 188).

In one interpretation, Sämpsä is thougth to be the son of Pellervoinen: “Sämsä, Fanus, a planter of the forest; sowing tree seeds on all the hills, moorlands and marshes that wennon’s bull plow. He was the son of Pellervoinen and was already early thinking about planting forests and trees.” (Ganander, 1789, p. 107).

It seems that the most common myth of Sämpsä goes somewhat like this: “Sämpsä, the god of agriculture and trees, spent the winters on a shallow islet, from which the summer boy every year woke him up. To no avail had the winter boy been trying to wake up Sämpsä. When Sämpsä woke up, nature started to green.” The story continues so, that “after the harvest, Sämpsä went back to his islet to hibernate.” (Stalo, 1995, p.66).

Sämpsä is the character which I sketched and re-drew the most. Although my initial idea was to create characters which would be quick to draw, I decided that Sämpsä Pellervoinen had to be covered in plants. Drawing various plants several times is by no means quick. I tested out drawing him with different techniques and tools and eventually decided to stick to my original idea even though it meant plenty of additional working hours.

My idea of Sämpsä was a character who, after sleeping over the whole winter, would burst with energy. I also imagined Sämpsä to run around, waking up all of the other plants and vegetation. In my mind the grower of trees and grain turned into the grower of everything, the being which wakes up the nature after the long winter. My interpretation may as well be false, but this was the reasoning behind the illustration of a long-legged, jumping character.

Fig 48. Ägräs, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 47. Previous page:
Sämpsä Pellervoinen, gouache painting.
Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.1.2. Character two: Ägräs – Spirit of harvest, vegetation and possibly fertility

Ägräs is on various occasions described as a two-parted turnip or an unusually large turnip. According to the most recent one of my source books, “A double turnip was considered bred by holy Ägräs and was the first to be taken to a new turnip pit (to grow)” and “turnips or potatoes grown together were a precursor to a good harvest.” (Siikala, 2018, p.409)

Ägräs is also at times written as Egres or Äkräs. The name Egres can be found in the Agricola’s list of gods as well as in many later entries. It was not until 1761 that the vicar of Leppävirta, I. D. Alopaeus, wrote that the name in question is actually Äcräs. (Harva, U. 1948). “… The name in question is widely known in both eastern and central Finland, even beyond our eastern border. In many places, Äkräs is understood to be a double turnip, sometimes also ‘cracked for its size’ ...” (Harva, 1948, p.209).

Ägräs is mentioned to be carried in a convoy to a nearby harvest field, which made me think of a carnival type of procession. This sparked in my head an image of a flowing “hair”, or in this case a flowing stalk of a swede.

Fig 49. Ägräs, version 1. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 50. Ägräs, version 2. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 51. Ägräs, version 3. Westin, Miila. (2019).

"There were also various kinds of magic spells associated with turnip sowing." It was said, for example, "Holy äkräs kormelitsa, grow as big turnips as these clouds go!" (Harva, 1948, p.211).

In some places, it has been customary to say that "when two turnips grow from one it has been bred by holy Äkrässie." (Harva, 1948, p.211). There are also examples of double turnips being seen as a manifestation of the spirit itself. This led me to think of Ägräs as a double turnip and to illustrate is as one. In addition, Harva mentios that Ägräs, as people in Suojärvi have specifically pointed out, is not imagined to be a human-like-being. (Harva, 1948).

Until very late, the discovery of a double turnip was followed by a celebration convoy, which escorted the double turnip to a new field. In Suojärvi though it is mentioned that this honor was reserved only for the forest turnip, not for the one in the turnip field. However, Äkräs has not been solely the spirit of turnips, nor the double turnip its only form. When potato cultivation became commonplace the name in question also passed on to double potatoes. (Harva, 1948).

Beyond the eastern border Ägräs has also been attached to flax and, consequently, it may be related to the Estonian lina-ema, which was kept in a cloth chest to help the flax to succeed. Thus, in addition to turnips, Ägräs is associated with cloths, hemp and potatoes, in particular their unusual forms, which were considered as manifestations of this spirit. Agricola also mentions peas, beans and cabbages. At times, Ägräs has also been considered a grain/cereal holder, but when asked if the double spike was one of its manifestations, the answer has been negative. (Harva, 1948).

Harva points out, that it seems as if Äkräs was originally understood as the power of fertility in general, which appears in the plant world as unusual associations. (Harva, U. 1948). Partly for this reason, as Ägräs was possibly thought to represent fertility, I wanted to include baby-swedes and turnips in the image. In one of the versions the baby turnips are still growing and sleeping under the ground, but as Ägräs steps on them they wake up. In the gouache painting the little ones are walking on the ground, creating a carnival convoy with Ägräs.

I looked at images of swedes before I began drawing them, but still illustrated the swedes a little too pointy, as they tend to have more of a flat form. This I noticed after the work was already finished. Also, at the exhibition I got some questions about this being, since it apparently was confused with a beetroot and a strawberry, which may be because of the unfamiliarity of the character as well as my colour choices.

7.1.3. Character three: Pellon Pekko – Spirit of barley and beer

According to Agricola, Pellon Pekko brought barley growth ("Ohran kasvun soi"). Renvall (1826) mentions the name in the form peltopekka and peltopekko, which until late meant home-made beer. Beer made from barley was said to be "quite pekka,"as in quite good ("on se

Fig 52. Ägräs, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 53. Pellon Pekko, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

aika pekkaa"), a saying that is still used to some extent. (Harva, 1948, p.191). Harva gives several examples, with which he states that, unlike in Agricola's list, Pellon Pekko has not only been the god of Karelians, but also in Western Finland a well-known sprite of barley and barley drinks. (Harva, 1948).

On a poem collecting trip made in 1909, Harva noticed that Pekka had marked the field sprite in some places, but more commonly appeared as a scare for children. He recorded that when the barley began to wither, a specific sacrifice was delivered to Peko: the milk of a black sheep. (Harva, 1948).

Ganander mentions that the spirit allowed for something called "the field's milk", and drinking it was called "tasting Pellon Pekko". (Krohn, 1915). According to Kaisa Vilhunen, when the field was cut, the last lantern was thrown to Peltopekka as a "head pillow." The last cutter had to do it. Silver was also sacrificed to ask for good growth of the grains and for the sprite to pick "black heads" from the grain. (Harva, U. 1948).

Fig 54. Pellon Pekko, sketches. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 55. Pellon Pekko. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 56. Pellon Pekko. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 57. Pellon Pekko as a rabbit. Westin, Miila. (2019).

I had various options of how to illustrate Pellon Pekko, but the mentions about an umbrella-like mushroom and "white like a hare" inspired me to draw the spirit as a white mushroom. Harva has written down one description: "As he ran from one corner of the field to another, it was white like a hare." (Harva, 1948, p. 193). I made a sketch about this mention, but later when I asked some friends what they thought of my painted sketches, they really did not like this one.

A similar belief about a white hare can be found in Sweden, and it may have originated there. In other descriptions it is said for example, that "Peltopekko is 'a tall, umbrella-like species of mushroom (tatti) growing in fields and acres." (Harva, 1948, p.195). It was difficult to find visualizations of Pellon Pekko. In Estonia though, they have a similar being called Peko, and there can be found wooden figures which represent this spirit.

In Ilomantsi Pellon pekko is understood as the spring shoot of a horsestail. (Harva, 1948). Nils Lid has speculated that when a horsetail, which is the first plant used for food in the spring, grows in a field, it would therefore have been called pellon pekko. (Harva, 1948).

Indeed, Lid assumes that the Byggvir of the ancient Icelanders, whose name is therefore derived from the word for 'barley', is originally a personified barley grain. In the poem Lokasenna, Byggvir is mentioned as small and swift to anger, and that brewing is in his power. Although the origin of the poem is controversial, it

Fig 58. Pellon Pekko, gouache painting . Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 58. Pellon Pekko. Westin, Miila. (2019).

is perhaps reasonable to assume that the Germans also once had a barley drink sprite similar to Pekko. (Harva, 1948).

In Finnish myths, there is another beer-spirit, Osmotar. Stalo mentions, that Osmotar was the beer creator, Pellon Pekko the beer-producing god. (Stalo, 1995). Harva brings up the idea that possibly "Pellon Pekko was not only a god of barley and barley drink, but also of the song and poetry of the ancient Finns." (Harva, 1948). Later on, I thought I could have used this mention also as an inspirational quote and could have created an illustration of a singing mushroom.

It is generally said about the field spirits, that if they were offended, they left the field and took the fortune with them. Sometimes the spirit was seen leaving the field in the form of white butterflies. This was also something I found interesting, but by the time I found this mention, I had already created the illustration. Maybe in the visual narrative later on I can use this finding as a part of the story.

7.1.4. Character four: Hiisi – A place and a being

For the keen illustrator of folklore, the Finnish myths give plenty of versions to choose from. Hiisi is a great example of this. Not only has hiisi used to mean a holy mountain or forest, but later on, hiisi as a creature has been perceived in various ways in different regions and communities. The stories are plentiful, as this is one of the best-known mythical beings in Finland, while also possibly the most misunderstood one.

On one hand, there is talk of a terrifying group of hiisis that live in Manala (underworld) that people need to be wary of. Stories also tell of thumb-sized underworld creatures without heads, that have been wandering around in forests and cemeteries. They follow their own trails in the forests, carry small bells and never touch a sleeping person. By another account they have a huge nose. The Hiisi creature here is apparently intermingled with the ghastly, stinking dead manala spirits, which in Finnish are called keiju or menninkäinen (a fairy or a goblin).

Hiisis were also thought to be the "bad" forest spirits in contrast to Tapio. They were said to be ugly, beardless, to have oblique eyes without eyelids and to be ragged. (Krohn, 1915). Pulkkinen mentions, that in some areas there have also been airborne hiisi people who rode horses, tinkled bells, had no heads and left no traces. (Pulkkinen, 2014).

In addition to these, there are also beings called forest hiisi, terrestrial hiisi, water hiisi, mountain hiisi and hiisis of death. Other mentions of hiisi are for example such as "Hiisi was considered a terribly strong giant, cruel and awful, herding bears and wolves like sheep" or "Hiisi means both the place called Horna and the devil..." (Haavio, 1967, p. 115) and "Witches believe hiisis can find and torture thieves or make a human deaf, blind, trembling and suffering from several diseases…" (Ganander, 1789, p.35). Ganander also mentions "hiijsi mother, hiijsi tribe, hiijsi's horse, hiijsi's moose, hiijsi's maid, hiijsi's cat, hiijsi's heaters (caves), hiijsi's castle, hiijsi's bird, hiijsi's nests, hiijsi's dog, hiijsi's folk and hijitär (female hiijsi). (Ganander, 1789, p. 35)

There are also stories of giant hiisis and the churns they have made. These were explanations for huge caves, "giant kettles" in the ground, which actually were formed while the bedrock surface was covered by a glacier. Folklore researcher Haavio ponders, that it is known, for example, that Hiisi in spells, beliefs and everyday language was considered as 'a devil'. "But

Fig 59. Hiisi. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 60. Hiisi, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 61. Hiisi. Westin, Miila. (2019).

whether hiisi is meant to be 'the devil' when it comes to mountain hiisi, water hiisi, and forest hiisi, it is questionable and hardly plausible." (Haavio, 1967, p. 115).

The likely process of the development of the hiisi myths is as follows: first Finns had sacred groves, which were called hiisi. Later on, the dead were buried in the hiisi forests and they become sacred cemetery groves. With the arrival of Christianity, hiisi forests were banned and destroyed by priests, and people were told that terrible beings live there. The word became almost equivalent with devils, and soon there were stories of hiisis of the underworld. Nowadays hiisi is usually described to be some kind of a forest troll or a giant.

It is apparent that when visualizing a hiisi being, an illustrator simply has to make choices on what one chooses to include or leave out. One plausible option would be to not illustrate Hiisi as a being at all and to argue that it is originally a forest. Still, hiisi myths have been told in Finland for such a long time and the being is so commonly known that it was an interesting challenge to attempt to illustrate the character.

I personally found Hiisi a rather difficult being to illustrate. The mentions about the being are so diverse and at the same time I was troubled by the idea that the being was originally a place, not anything troll-like. In the end I feel like my version of Hiisi turned out as somewhat of a generic version of a forest troll. This was likely because I couldn't form a clear idea of the being in my mind and kept going back to more generic versions of it. I did sketch Hiisi as a more devil-like as well as a giant, but those versions did not feel right to me.

The Hiisi I illustrated is a kind and blue forest spirit, who interacts with the forest and the fish in the lake. Despite the generic aspects of it, I can easily see this character as a part of my visual narrative later on. I think I will later on keep trying to develop different versions of this being.

Fig 62. Hiisi. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 63. Hiisi, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.1.5. Character five: Maahinen - Together-dweller of the underground

One of the favourite creatures of the northern belief tradition is Maahinen (gnome, earthling), a human-like social being who, in his underground world, spends his own human-like life. The relationship between maahinen and humans is ambivalent: they can act as helpers and donors, but also as malicious beings, teasers, disease initiators, and child changers. (Kamppinen & Enges, 2010.)

Lönnrot's dictionary mentions "maahiset, who are said to be 'small beings believed to live in the ground'." Maahinen is characterized by underground life, although it could sometimes show itself to people. "Similar underground beings who, when angry, cause disease, are found in the beliefs of many other old peoples." (Harva, 1948, p. 263).

In descriptions of Maahinen one of the most common narratives is how a man/woman falls in the world of maahinen folk. By analyzing these stories, it is possible to visualize the imagery the narrators have had of the underground world. Assuming that the stories are also believed to be true, one can speak of a worldview, in this case an idea of the layered structure of the world. (Kamppinen & Enges, 2010).

Similar to hiisi, the word maahinen also has various meanings. Harva explains, that "in many places in our country, Maahinen has survived in the memory of the old people only as a name for various dermatological diseases, rashes, swelling and abscesses that were believed to 'be caught' from the earth, water, wind or fire." The sprite of land, forest, water and home is also often understood to be maahinen. (Harva, 1948, p. 263).

Harva mentions that they are believed to be very compact in size and reminiscent of people of the past. Like people, they live in their underground huts with their family, do their daily chores there, have fun, sing and play, have children, celebrate weddings, visit each other and appear sometimes in people's homes as well. (Harva, U. 1948).

Maahinen folk seem to wander a lot on the ground as well as under it. "Lencqvist mentions that maahinen folk prefer to reside in certain places, like under the trees, stones and buildings." (Harva, 1948, p. 266).

Fig 64. Maahinen, sketch. Westin, Miila. (2019).

There has also been a very common belief about the fires of maahinen folk. "The themes in the stories of interactions between maahiset and humans are often international." (Harva, 1948, p. 269). One of the international stories is the fear that maahinen or troll may exchange his own child for a human child. It is likely, that this was simply a way to explain malformations caused by rice disease. This though contradicts the description of maahinen folk as beautiful beings. (Pulkkinen, 2014)

Like hiisi, maahinen can also vary in size. "Although maahinen folk usually appear as miniature beings in popular beliefs, they may still sometimes appear

Fig 65. Maahinen, versions. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 66. Maahinen. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 67. Maahinen, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

to be the size of an adult person." (Harva, 1948, p. 270). They can also change their form, and ants in particular have been considered a to be actually maahinen folk. (Harva,1948). Blood, tin and silver have sometimes been sacrificed to ants.

Maahinen folk are also associated with polar opposites. It was thought that everything in the world "beyond" was upside down, right was left, etc. Therefore, for example, you could get away from the forest cover - the enchantment of the forest - by turning your coat or headgear upside down. Harva suggest that the belief of an underground world may be based on a mirror image of the water surface: the underground world has seemed to be upside down and right has seemed left.

The ancient people have also called maahinen folk the keepers of protectors of land or a place. Krohn suggested, that maahinen folk were spirits of dead people, but this seems to not have been the case in comparison to myths in Norway. We have understood maahiset to be "old people," and Harva distinguishes maahiset from other sprites. "Krohn's assumption that the sprites of different places would be ghosts killed at some point somewhere
does not apply to maahiset who are believed to live with their families in their underground villages and who have been deemed to have ownership of their former residences." (Harva, 1948, p. 318).

Related to this is the belief that when looking for a place for a house, the head of the household must sleep at the place of the house at night and in their sleep maahinen will let the sleeper know if it is suitable to settle in that place. (Harva, 1948).

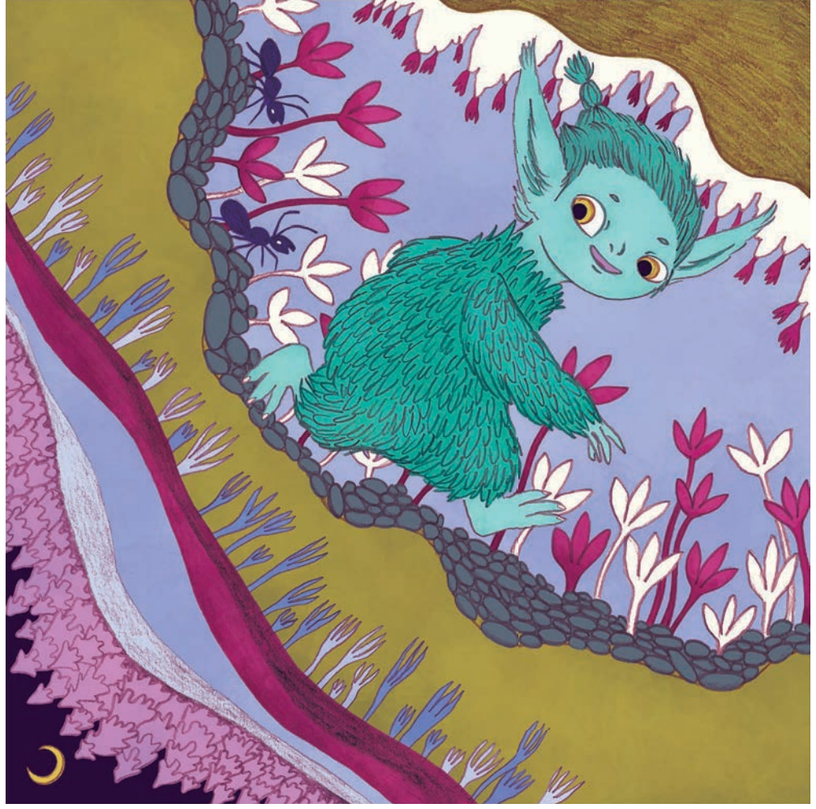

Fig 69. Maahinen, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

In Finland maybe the best-known mythical creature is Tonttu, the elf. Stories of the elves have constantly been mixed with stories of maahiset, because their purpose has been similar. The name of the elf, tonttu, is due to the Swedish word for a place, tomt. When tonttu has been believed to live on the land, it has been difficult to distinguish it from maahinen. (Harva, 1948). Risto Pulkkinen has described the elves to have possibly been the size of humans and often female.

Maahinen folk are also distinguished from menninkäiset, who are thought of as ghosts, spirits of the dead and small creatures, who are thought to live around the houses and trees, as well as underground. Like maahinen folk, they may appear as insects, but instead of ants, for example, as larvae, lice, bedbugs or beetles. In many places in Finland, all insects have been called by the name menninkäinen. (Harva, 1948).

Ganander writes that the fairies are the same as 'männingäiset'. Krohn points out that the myth of maahinen is very similar in our neighbouring countries. "In German, Männchen, or mängen, means spirits that appear as little people. --- In Swedish the same is 'de små under jorden', 'underground miniatures'." Krohn goes on to say that there is also "de underjordiska" in Swedish, the equivalent of which can be considered as people in the underworld, ie in Manala (manala, maan-alaiset, Finnish for 'ones under the ground'). (Krohn, 1915, p.43).

Fig 68. Maahinen sketches. Westin, Miila. (2019).

In conclusion, maahinen folk can probably be illustrated in all kinds of ways, but they are often mentioned to be human-like, small, and to live upside down underground. I chose not to illustrate Maahinen as human-like, but I did keep my versions of them upside down.

In the gouache painting my illustration of Maahinen is upside down and blue in colour. In the digital illustration the colour turned greener but Maahinen is still upside down. I included ants next to the character to remind about the connection to ants. Although Maahinen was often mentioned to be human-like, I chose not to illustrate my version as too human.

Fig 71. Tapio, sketches. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.1.6. Character six: Tapio – The forest itself

Various folklore researchers explain, that Tapio is nothing but the forest itself, which appears in the poems as personified. As Harva writes, "in the dictionary of Juslenius (1745) Tapio only means 'forest'" and "… the various verses in which Tapio is mentioned as living in the forest clearly show a blurring of the original meaning of the word Tapio." (Harva, 1948, p. 349)

The poems though do have all kinds of versions of the personified forest, and I will next go through some of them. For example, there are mentions of Tapio as "oak tapio" (tamminen tapio) and "twig-filled tapio" (risun täytöinen tapio). "Some late mentions describe Tapio as downright human-like creature arriving at the forester's campfire." (Harva, 1948, p. 353). In some of these, Harva thinks it actually refers to maahinen folk. Tapio is described as "Golden king of the forest" who was worshiped, and who has "a conifer hat and beard of hanging moss." (Harva, 1948, p.354). "Tapio may also appear as a feminine: 'Tapio is the mother of the forest, the old wife of the conifer', but already the continuation of the poem: 'hear, forest, wake up, Tapio!' Reveals its true essence." (Harva, 1948, p. 354).

Fig 70. Tapio. Westin, Miila. (2020).

"The fact that Tapio is mentioned in our poems as male or female also shows that the old people have not been able to form any established image of it. The 'spirit' who, according to the worldview of our ancestors, relates to the forest itself and as such explains the lone nature of the forest spirit has also been called 'emuu', but the emuu of the forest ('mother') has been as obscure as other 'emuus' of nature," Harva describes. In comparative research it has been found that Estonians have a similar metsaema, Livonians the mõtsa-jema and mordovians the viŕ-ava. (Harva, 1948, p. 354).

Harva mentions the forest maiden, which is though separate from Tapio. This creature has an equivalent in Sweden (skogsjungfru) and is picturesque from the front but has a bark-like back. I will mention this being separately later in this chapter.

Tapio is also associated with Tapio's "family". Tapio is said to have a wife Mielikki, a son Nyyrikki, sometimes a daughter Annikki or Tyytikki, etc. In addition to Tapio, a large number of different creatures are connected to the forest, from maahiset to terrestrial border elves and from forest maidens to hiisis. (Harva, 1948).

Ganander Mentions Tapio twice, as two different things but as the same as well: "Tapio, the god of the forest who rules all the animals in the forest. He has the power to hand them over to the hunter or release them from it. He was the god of all hunting gear." And "Tapio, often of the forest itself; the Bear of the Forest is the lord and king of animals in the North." Ganander also describes Tapio's beard: "Tapio, the forest sprite himself. Partly because of his age, partly because of his reverent beard, he is revered as Ukko when she is asked for bears and hares." So Tapio is the giver of bears and hares, but also protects other animals from his/her own: "Tapio was also said to protect cattle from bears and other wildlife in the forest." (Ganander, 1789, p.109)

Pulkkinen (2018) also mentions various details about Tapio's appearance: A hanging moss beard and a conifer hat on his head that swayed to the tops of the

Fig 72. Tapio. Westin, Miila. (2020).

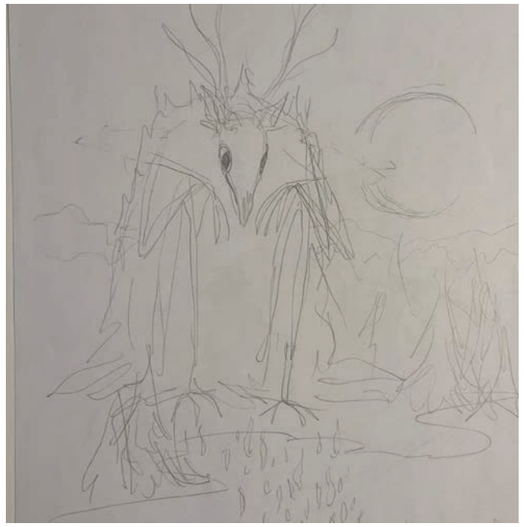

Fig 73. Tapio, sketch. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 74. Tapio, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

trees. Often described as long as a wilderness six. On the other hand, also a feminine deity. Pulkkinen notes, that instead of or alongside Tapio, the other names Hippa and Kuippana often appear in spells. (Pulkkinen, R. & Lindfors, S. 2018)

Stalo writes that "by changing its size according to the environment, Tapio was ubiquitous in the forest. In the forest he was the height of the trees, but the height of the grass in the meadows." (Stalo, 1995, p. 23).

Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate, when the poems describe Tapio and when a forest sprite. "A gray cylinder hat and a hanging moss fur coat are mentioned as part of forest sprites costume. Otherwise, its outward appearance changed according to its state of mind. When it was pleased, all the edges of the garment were full of glittering ornaments, its large brown eyes looked gently, and it had the voice of a woman; meeting it like this was followed by a good catch." (Krohn, 1915, p. 73). When, on the other hand, it was stubborn, no ornaments were visible at all, and it looked sharply; there was no hope of success then, but there was often an offer of an accident that had to be avoided with a sacrifice." (Krohn, 1915, p. 73).

At times Tapio is considered to be a name for a bear, the king of the forest, and sometimes it's considered a human-like king who has a whole family and a house in the forest.

Above all, however, the forest spirit is represented by a bear. A bear is sometimes said to be a forest keeper. The bear's nicknames mönnikäinen and kouko indicate that the bear has been considered a manifestation of the deceased. Tapio can also be compared to the bear's common nickname "forest". (Krohn, 1915). The many figurative names for bear derive from fear of mentioning it with his proper word.

Similarly, Tapio has various names. Some of the names for the king of the forest, e.g. Kuihkanen, kuikuli, kuihtana, etc., Renwall has associated with the Finnish word kuikkana, pitkäkaulainen (long neck). (Krohn, 1915) As Laura Stark has noted (2002), in living folk religion, supernatural forces are often invisible and difficult to define. In forest beliefs, for example, forest sprite, the forest, and bear are often synonymous names. The appearance of forest sprites and their other external characteristics are therefore not the most useful starting point for folklore research. - - More important is what the spirit does and why. (Letonsaari, T. 2009). The varying names of Tapio can also be explained easily by simply remembering the time frame. "In the golden age of mythical perception, language was not as differentiated as it is today." (Korte, 2007, p. 200)

Tapio is one of the Finnish mythical beings which is often mentioned and illustrated. In my version I wanted to show Tapio as some kind of a living forest. There are similar versions of Tapio, but in many of them Tapio seems somewhat like a human who is covered in trees. My version is similar, but not human-like at all. I also made sure to use color blue in all of my illustrations of Tapio.

Similar to Sämpsä, my version of Tapio is covered in plants and trees and not quick to re-draw at all. This Tapio also resembles maybe a moose or a deer, and is much bigger than the tallest trees.

7.2. The other mythical beings in the exhibition

I will include here short descriptions of the Finnish mythical beings which were part of the exhibition artworks but which I did not study as extensively as my six main characters. There were 18 illustrated beings in total, so here is a description of 12 of them.

Fig 75. Hongatar, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.2.1. Hongatar

Hongatar is the emuu of bears, a so-called species protector. Emuu in Eastern Finland and Karelia means a mythical creature that is the parent of a plant or animal species, the mother. Emuus, such as "Käreitär, Hillervo, Tuheroinen and Holohonka, have given birth to or created a plant or animal species and are responsible for the operation and care of this species." (Haavio, 1967, p. 554). It has been speculated that Hongatar's name would refer to the tree to which the skull was lifted at the end of the feast of a bear hunt. Some spells consider Hongatar to be Tapio's daughter. It must have really been the bear's protector, Ganander's "mother of the bears," because Hongatar is often mentioned both when landing cattle on pasture and when repairing injuries caused by bears, or "bear's wrath." (Pulkkinen, 2014)

Fig 76. Hongatar, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 77. Aarni, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.2.2. Aarni

Aarni is considered the Finnish equivalent of the foreign Kratt and the keeper spirit of a treasure. This elf-like creature was seen on sunny days or at night by the fire in the woods and hills drying and polishing his moldy money; sometimes it twangs them when it was in a favorable mood. It could also appear on a festive night like Midsummer's Eve and burn mold from its treasures with a blue flame. (Krohn, 1914). However, several sources indicate that the name of the being was not necessarily Aarni.

Fig 78. Aarni, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.2.3. Rongoteus

Given the dominance of rye among our crops, it is understandable that when Agricola speaks of the Karelian grain owners, he first mentions the rye holder: Rongoteus / Ruista annoi ("Rongoteus gave rye"). However, on the basis of this brief communication, it is difficult to decide what this holder is imagined to be or where it got its name. (Krohn, 1914). Based on the available sources, we cannot decide what kind of creature Rongoteus or Runkateiva has been imagined to be. Admittedly, there is a note that speaks of a "rye-man" that lives in a rye and is asked to produce a good harvest. Siikala (2012) mentions that in the 18th century, Ukko, Hiisi, Ahti, Tapio, Äkräs, Runkoteivas and Pellon Pekko were still worshipped in Eastern Finland.

7.2.4. Kuippana

"Dean of Leppävirta Alopaeus, in 1767, recorded: Rongotäus was worshiped for the growth of rye, Äckräs gave

Fig 79. Rongoteus, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 80. Kuippana, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

turnips, Achti fish, Tapio all kinds of forest game but Kuiktilassi hares. After that, Kuiktilassi (Kuippana?) can no longer be found in folk poetry or other early literature." (Haavio, 1967, p. 79). According to Ganander, Kuippana, on the other hand, would be the head of the forest, a tall and terrible gray-bearded creature. "Kuippana drove foxes and hares into traps and strings." (Ganander, 1789, p. 63).

Krohn and Harva assumed that the hare-giver "Kuiktilassi" belonged to the name-family of the king of the forest, Tapio, that gives hunting luck and prey. Haavio, on the other hand, writes the creature's name could originate from a word used for describing the deliciousness of meat, but also notes that the Finnish hunter has spoken of "destiny divider" under different names: Tapio, Tapiotar, Osatyttö, Metsän Onni, Laus, Mielu, Mielikki, Lyyöikki, Kuippana, Palvonen, Pajainen, etc. Each of these names has a background and all mean the same thing. Thus, the Kuiktlassi or Kuippana I illustrated, the giver of hares, is possibly the same as Tapio, the forest itself. (Haavio, 1967).

7.2.5. Vetehinen

In Ingrian, the name of the Mother of Water is also known as Vetehinen, which corresponds to the Russian name vodjanoi. Both beings are believed to attract drowning people. According to Krohn (1914), "Veje's own, i.e. vedehine, was recorded from Karelia in Tver, which rose to the beach to brush its head and it was ill fate to see it. In North Karelia, Finland, a distinction is made between a Näkki that seized a swimmer in the water and a veteinen, an infection or a disease. According to another information, Näkki is just a newer name for a watery man who, just before drowning, was seen sitting on a limestone combing his long hair.

The relationship between the different names of the water sprites in the Karelian region is thus as follows. The latest and bordering Finnish Karelia is a Swedish-originated Näkki, before that there was the Vetehinen, which was adapted from Russia. The oldest is the mother of water, Veden emä, which Agricola already mentions in the list of Karelian gods saying it took fish to the net. (Krohn, 1914).

Fig 81. Kuippana, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 82. Vetehinen, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 83. Vetehinen, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 84. Ahti, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.2.6. Ahti

According to Agricola: Achti / wedhest Caloja toi., meaning Ahti brought fish from the water. However, the mentions of Ahti are very mixed. On the one hand, Ahti is mentioned as one of the names of the mother of water, Veden emä. On the other hand, it is stated that the word Ahti refers to fish gear. The name Ahti is associated with the Scandinavian Ahva, which means water. Ingrian spells speak of the Ahvo of the sea. (Harva, 1948).

Fig 85. Ahti, mixed media. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Ahti is also mentioned as a creature of the forest: "The golden king of the forest, the gracious Ahti of the forest" (Krohn, 1914, p. 314) and the name Ahti is also found in healing spells: Ahti of the water, Ahti of the sea, Ahti of the earth and Ahti of the wind. (Krohn, 1914).

7.2.7. Kuumet

In Finnish ancient religion, the moon has been associated with more beliefs than the sun. A few of the myths relate to a creature called Kuumet, but there are very few mentions of it. Kuumet is in some poems a creature that put a ring around the moon and tried to pull it down from the sky. Beings called Kapees prevented this. (Harva, 1948).

Kuumet and Kapees are creatures that are difficult to figure out what their meaning has been in ancient times. Kapees, for example, are mentioned as opponents of Kuumet, but also as forest animals in other poems.

There is also a creature called Rahko associated with the stories about the moon. The person who committed suicide turned into Rahko and had to tar the moon day in, day out, but after a long time as a Rahko, he was allowed to become one of Kapees. (Harva, 1948).

Fig 86. Kuumet, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.2.8. Tonttu

The oldest information about the Finnish homeowner is included in Agricola's list of Häme gods: Tontu/ Honen menon hallitzi. ("Tonttu / manages what is going on in the room.") (Harva, 1948, p. 320).

"The Swedish name Tomte, from which the elf is derived, is an abbreviation of the compound words such as tomtegubbe, tomtebisse, tomtekall, where the latter word means' hubby ', and tomt' country of residence, plot '." (Harva, 1914, p. 320).

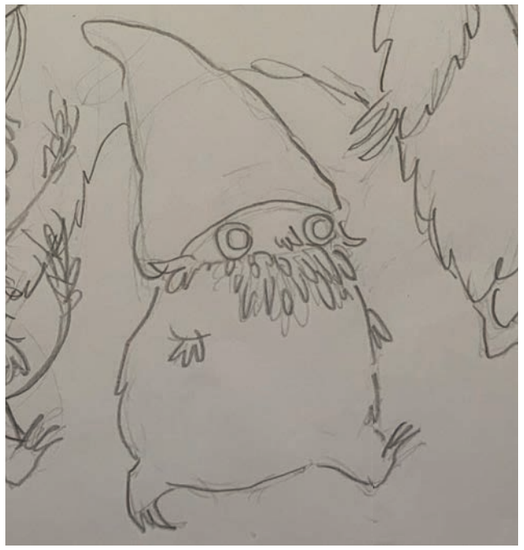

Fig 87. Tonttu, sketch. Westin, Miila. (2019).

Fig 88. Tonttusaattue, post card. Westin, Miila. (2018).

Fig 89. Tonttuja, postcard. Westin, Miila. (2018).

According to Krohn, the elves who lived in the attics were uglier and more frightening than other sprites. It is said in the western parts of our country to often appear as a small man with a peculiar outfit: a gray suit and a red pipe cap on the head. A later viewpoint, both here and elsewhere in the Nordic region, is that there is a perception that an elf has only one eye in the middle of its forehead and that it carries the property of others to its owner.

I have illustrated various versions of Tonttu in christmas cards over the past nine years. The version of Tonttu I illustrated here (Fig 90) is similar to the ones I have drawn many times before (see Fig 87 and Fig 88).

Fig 90. Tonttu, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.2.9. Liekkiö

Liekkiö, "the flame", also known as Ihtiriekko, is the spirit of a secretly born and killed infant child who haunted with malicious rage and crying. The sounds have been made by nocturnal birds whose cries could remind of a sound of a murdered, forest-hidden child. (Krohn, 1914).

Ihtiriekko follows the people who happen to pass by its cemetery. It hopes to enter the blessed land or even receive a blessing. When its wish has come true, its voice has ceased to be heard. The "Ihti" in the name of the ghost is apparently the same as Finnish "itse", self, which originally meant 'shadow and character soul' and the willow grouse (Finnish: riekko) is again known as the name of a bird. It is likely that the ghost may have had the meaning of a 'soul bird'. As such, it may have meant more than the spirit of a little one hidden in the woods. (Krohn, 1914).

Fig 91. Virvatulet, sketch. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 93. Virvatulet, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 92. Liekkiö, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

7.2.10. Virvatuli

Virvatuli (in plural virvatulet) is a small fire-like spirit which can be seen on a lake of a swamp. According to Krohn, the fires of the treasure-protecting sprites have been combined with the flames of fire, which arise from the shining gases formed through decay, but which, in popular opinion, are manifestations of the spirits of the deceased. (Krohn, 1914).

7.2.11.Metsänhaltija, Forest spirit

Especially in southwestern Finland, the forest maiden was charming from the front but disgusting in the back, like an old pine tree's barked side. (Pulkkinen, 2014). Krohn mentions that the forest spirit has also been mentioned to appear in the form of a bird. The forest spirits had their own territories and were offered sacrifices. (Pulkkinen & Lindfors, 2018).

Fig 94. Metsänhaltija, gouache painting . Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 95. Para, sketch. Westin, Miila. (2019).

7.2.12. Para

Para has possibly been thought of as something that brings all kinds of goods into the house, and they have been different for different purposes. The Ingrian bread para was imagined to cut a narrow alley on its way when passing through a grain field. (Krohn, 1914).

Harva mentions Para to look or be made of a distaff. (Harva, 1948). The Ingrian coin para differs from the bread para and milk para in that it was red and sparkling. This para is probably meant when a flying silver-clear ball with a long sparkling tail is described.

For example, about a milk para who stole his mistress's milk from a neighbor it is mentioned that "often the para was so full when carrying the milk that it vomited on the road." This vomit was called Para butter, it is a kind of mold that grows into a decaying tree in rot. (Krohn, 1914).

Fig 96. Para, gouache painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Chapter 8:
The final illustrations and the exhibition

In this chapter I will explain in more detail the process of the artworks I made for the thesis based on what I had learned about the mythical beings. In the end, I created a long gouache painting and twelve coloured mixed-media illustrations, as well as constructed a solo exhibition in a gallery in Helsinki, Finland. In this chapter I will describe the challenges and decisions of the process.

8.1. Background for where and when the illustrations were created

As we all know, in the spring of 2020, the world encountered Covid-19 pandemic. When it started, I was in Indonesia, drawing the illustrations for my thesis as well as for the upcoming exhibition in Galleria Kuvitus. As our, and everyone else's, plans for the whole year quickly changed, we returned to Finland and for the next weeks I was busy re-arranging my life. Due to the circumstances I ended up postponing the thesis project as well as my graduation.

In June I was able to focus again on the artworks of the thesis. I finished the twelve illustrations of the mythical beings I had drawn with pencil. I soon realized that I had missed some important details during the process, such as space for bleeds. After more than a decade of working with printing materials, forgetting the bleeds of an image says something about how scattered my mind was at the time.

Fig 97. Illustration by Jo Rioux. (Instagram.com/joriouxdraws).

When the first illustrations were finished, I was able to concentrate on the four-meter-long gouache painting, which had somehow survived when I moved to a new apartment in the first weeks of July. Initially, that painting was not supposed to be a part of my thesis project but instead I thought of it as the main artwork of the exhibition.

8.2. The pencil illustrations, 12 pieces

I chose six characters to study more extensively in my thesis process. In total, I illustrated eighteen characters for the exhibition and the thesis. Twelve of them I illustrated with pencil on paper and edited on computer. As we have seen in the previous chapter's descriptions of the mythical beings I studied, it was difficult to identify a definite visual description of them, or even their size. Hiisi and Tapio both could be anything from miniature to gigantic, and Maahinen is described as beautiful but ugly, at least as a child. This of course gives plenty of freedom for the illustrator interpreting the myths.

During my thesis' artwork process I was inspired by several artists, but especially by Nuria Tamarit and Jo Rioux. As far as I can tell, they both use pencils to draw their illustrations and then illustrate and colour them mostly digitally. I wanted to try this type of technique, because I love the artworks they create. Although I kept to my own style of drawing, I experimented on this new technique on the final illustrations.

While sketching the illustrations I spent time on working out the structure of the images. I paid attention to shapes and negative space but decided to leave out most of the shading. The shades I created were mostly flat, so they create more of a texture than a shade. The colours of the illustrations are done digitally in Photoshop using a Wacom tablet.

Already in the beginning of the project I thought I wanted to create illustrations that contrast the subject.

Fig 98. Tapio. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 99. Pellon Pekko. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 100. Rongoteus. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 101. Kuippana. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 102. Ägräs. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 103. Hongatar. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 104. Sämpsä Pellervoinen. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 105. Hiisi. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 106. Aarni. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 107. Maahinen. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 108. Ahti. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 109. Vetehinen. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 110. Sketch. Westin, Miila. (2020). *Fig 111. Final works on the gallery wall. Westin, Miila. (2020).*

Instead of using some kind of old and traditional technique for illustrating old myths and folklore, I wanted to use modern digital tools and bright colours. It is to emphasize the timelessness of the myths and to make them more approachable. A visual idea can be modernized in the same manner as how an old written text can be modernized for the modern readers.

Some of the guidelines which I tried to keep in mind while creating my thesis illustrations were simple words. I wanted to aim for something playful, colorful, modern and possibly Finnish. I also wanted the illustrations to be more than simply a character floating in the air – I wanted the characters to do something and to have an environment around them. With some of the characters I succeeded better than with others. I still feel they could be more proactive and immersed in doing something instead of simply running or sitting around. I do like how Sämpsä Pellervoinen and Pellon Pekko interact with plants and Ägräs and Maahinen are on the move. Tapio though simply sits and watches the virvatulet, similar to how Hiisi watches the lake fish.

I also tried not to place all of the characters in the middle of the image. Ägräs and Sämpsä are the only ones right in the middle, but the other ones are placed differently. With the illustration of Maahinen I am happy about the graphic elements in it, and how I succeeded in placing the character upside down underground while still keeping the character upright. I also added ants in the image, as in the folklore they were often mentioned to represent Maahinen.

When the pencil drawings were done, I scanned them in 600 dpi resolution. I wanted the resolution to be higher as is optimal for line art, but at the time it was not possible to scan images at the university or the libraries and I had to go with the second-best option. I cleaned some mistakes in the pencil drawings in Photoshop, and also edited the contrasts. Then I made some colour combinations I liked and added rough colour blocks to the scanned images and transferred the illustrations as psd-files to my iPad and coloured them in Procreate. After the colours were done, I transferred the images back to my computer and made some edits in the colours again in Photoshop.

I was naturally happier with some of the illustrations than others. For example, I felt like both of my versions of Vetehinen failed in some ways. The being turned out too generic and visually boring in my eyes. I also thought Hiisi was a difficult one and I could have tried to make it also more interesting and less troll-like. I probably should have tried to create more sketches of these characters.

Also, after realizing that my version of Ahti looked a lot like a selkie, I would have liked to make a new version of it. During the process of illustrating I constantly found new information and wanted to re-draw my previous illustrations. At some point I had to decide to stick with the ones I had made and to leave the revisions for the visual narrative later on.

My personal favourites of the illustrations now are the illustrations of Sämpsä Pellervoinen and Hongotar. I feel like the details and colours turned out nicely, despite still being able to spot some mistakes I made. I also liked the only version I made of Rongoteus, as well as Pellon pekko. They look funny and kind. I also like the colours and feeling of the illustrations of Maahinen and Ägräs.

8.3. The four-meter-long gouache painting

This piece needs a few words of background story. When I was a child, my mother brought home long paper rolls, which were the excess paper left from cutting maps of swamp areas. I filled those paper rolls with illustrations, which were accompanied by a story I told while drawing. In recent years I have created a number of works that have also been elongated in shape and continuing from picture to picture. To me, this long form feels familiar and easy to use and I believe I will resume working with this format.

Early this spring I discussed the artworks of the exhibition with the curator of the gallery, Veera Pekkinen, and pondered, whether I should attempt to create the largest piece in digital or traditional media. She suggested I should go with traditional, and I immediately felt it was the right choice to make. Despite often working with

Fig 112. Sketching on an A3 paper. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 113. Creating a continuous image. Westin, Miila. (2020).

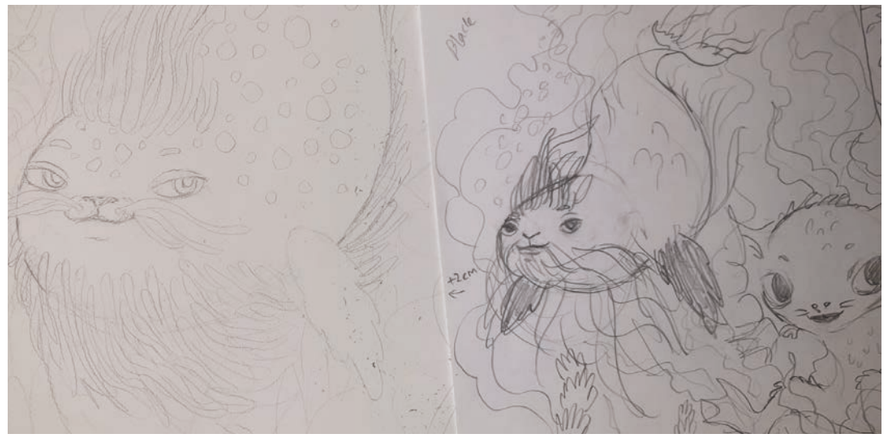

Fig 114. Transferring the small sketch to the large canvas with details. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 115. Painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

digital tools I have always felt like I enjoy working more with traditional tools. Nevertheless, I was not extremely familiar with gouache paints since I had only used them a few times before.

To have a four-meter-long paper canvas I needed to buy a massive roll of watercolour paper and then to cut it to the size I wanted. As a result, I have enough excess watercolour paper to paint on probably for a decade.

Fig 116. Base-painting and adding details. Westin, Miila. (2020).

I had sketched the characters a few times before and was pleased with two of the bigger sketches. In those, I had divided the characters into two groups: the spirits of the forest and the spirits of the agricultural times. Some of the beings I sketched several times, like Sämpsä Pellervoinen. Others, like Ahti, I sketched only once on an A3 size paper and then transferred the rough sketch to the watercolour paper with more details (see previous page).

Painting the beings with gouache was slow, as I had assumed. I enjoyed creating them though, as I was able to take the paper canvas with me to the summer cabin and other places. I simply rolled open the part which I was painting and continued there. Because of the size of it, I did not see the whole artwork that often, but every now and then I checked whether the colours were consistent. I also did not sketch the whole piece at once but every now and then resumed both the painted part and the sketch.

I named the painting "Myyttisten jäljillä", roughly translated as "In the footsteps of myths" which sounds better in Finnish. It is impossible to estimate how many hours I spent on the painting. Julianna, a friend of mine, helped me in the end when the deadline was drawing near, as I realized that every part of the painted area needed a base colour before I could paint the final colours. She helped me with the base colours.

I did finish the painting on time, but afterwards when I looked at the whole piece, I noticed that I had painted the ending part with plenty more details than the beginning, which was the reason for needing help with finishing it. My friend commented that "you're painting like it's vector art." Maybe next time I need to try to keep

Fig 117. Cutting the canvas to the right size. Westin, Miila. (2020).

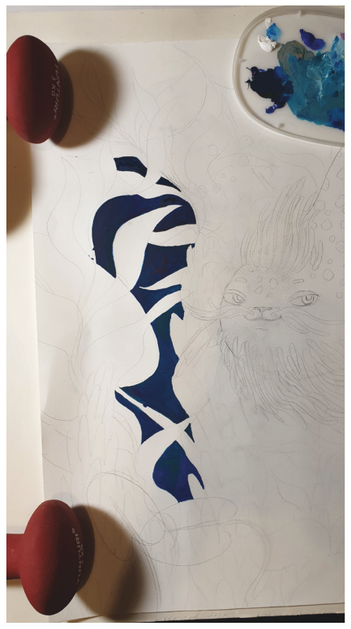

Fig 118. First touch of paint. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 119. Painting on a standing desk. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 120. Painting on the floor. Westin, Miila. (2020).

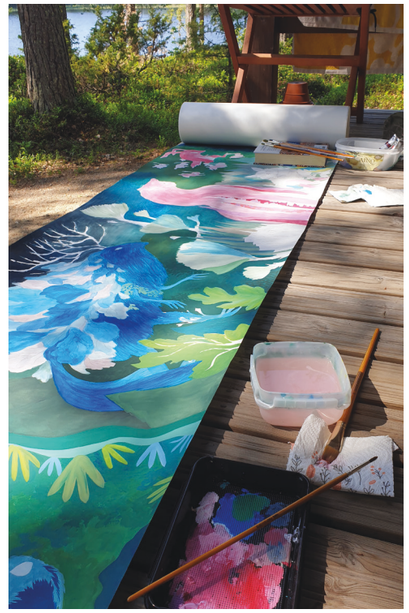

Fig 121. Painting at the summer cabin. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 122. The almost finished painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 123. Tapio before the details. Westin, Miila. (2020).

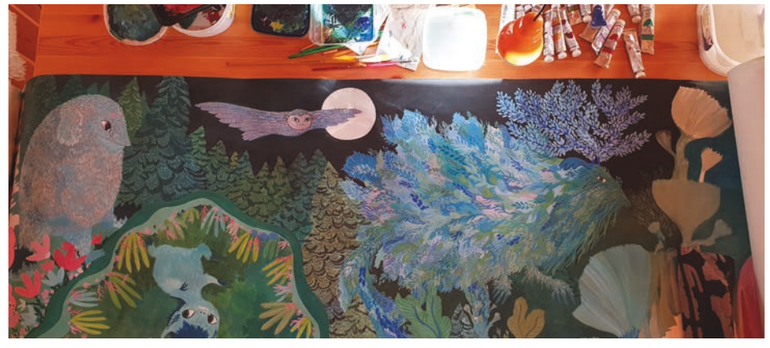

Fig 124. Tapio with details. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 125. Painting part by part. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 126. Finished painting. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 127. Detail (photograph collage caused the cuts). Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 128. Mock-up on the wall & painting the wall art for the exhibition. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 129. Continuing without the mock-up. Westin, Miila. (2020).

my brushwork looser and more relaxed. On the other hand, later I heard that a well-known Finnish illustrator had seen the painting and praised that it was created with good technique.

8.4. Building the exhibition "Myyttiset", "The Mythical"

Finnish Illustrators Association has a free gallery space for illustrators, but they choose the exhibiting artists through an application process. I applied for the exhibition space in the autumn of 2019 and was accepted. I had quite free hands with the artworks and how I wanted to plan the use of space in the gallery. In the beginning of August, two weeks before the opening event, I went to the gallery and began the build-up. My boyfriend helped me clean up the space and I put plaster in the holes on the walls from the previous exhibition as well as painted the walls white. One of the walls needed to be painted three times, as it was previously bright yellow. After that, I put a mock-up of the four-meter-long gouache painting on the wall, which served as a reference for me. My plan was to continue the painting on the walls, although I only had a vague idea in my mind at this point.

I picked out six different colours at a hardware store and found some excess paints in the basement of the gallery. For the next week I painted imaginary plants and elements on the walls of the gallery. I did not have a sketch for them, but simply improvised them as I painted. At this point I had worked tirelessly through the whole summer without hardly any days off, and my mind was not able to sketch or plan anything anymore. I could only go by trial and error and stick to things I was familiar with.

My idea initially had been to use the wall paintings as something that would tie the exhibition together. I felt like the gouache painting and the digital illustrations were far apart and the space was too empty. Although my illustrator colleague commented that my fear was unnecessary and the space would have been fine without the mural, I am happy I made it. Somehow the wall mural made the space more "mine" in a sense. I have painted various wall murals in different cities and they always contain these colourful, curling fantasy plants I like to paint them. Their purpose was not something essential for the exhibition, but more like something I personally wanted to include.

Fig 130. Natural elements. Westin, Miila. (2020).

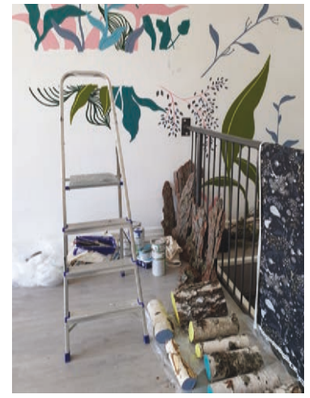

Fig 131. Building the exhibition and painting the tree stumps. Westin, Miila. (2020).

During the painting week I also asked my friend Reetta to come over and take photographs of the gouache painting. I then edited one of the RAW photo files into vector art to be placed as a sticker on the gallery's window and added the date and title of the exhibition as well as my name. I also wrote, translated and vectorized the informational text stickers for the walls of the gallery. The gallerist promised to handle the printing of the stickers.

Next week my mother brought some mosses, lichens and tree roots from the summer cabin and helped me to create a set-up of them. I wanted to include natural elements in the exhibition, because Finnish nature is the only thing that still connects us to the ancient peo-

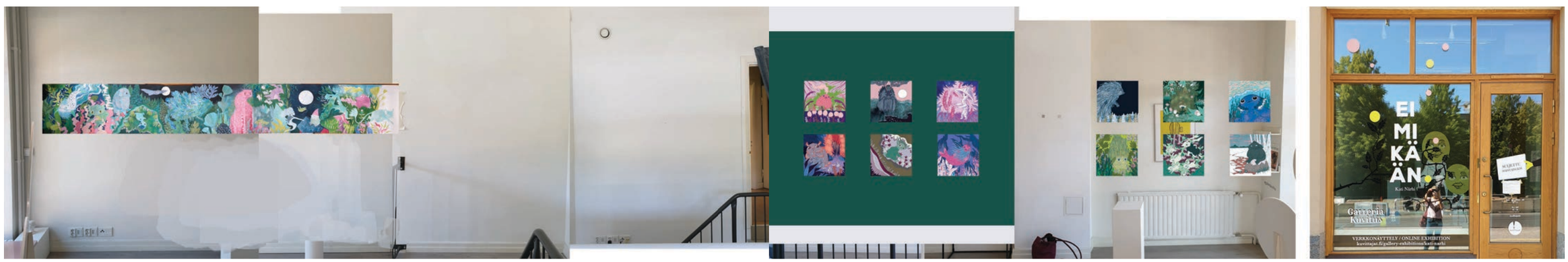

Fig 132. Rough plan for the exhibition space. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 133. Gouache painting on the wall. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 134. Image by galleria Kuvitus (2020).

ple whose myths I had illustrated on the walls. We also brought in some birch stumps and I painted the cutting areas of them in bright colours and placed them around the gallery.

Printing the digital artworks for the exhibition proved somewhat frustrating. I was short on time and felt like the quickest way was to print them myself and to later on get better prints from a printing house. I had had bad experiences with some printing companies in Helsinki before, and wanted to make sure there would be no setbacks close to the exhibition's opening day.

Due to the COVID-19 situation though, I was not allowed to go to the university. I got a special permission from my thesis supervisor to visit the university's printing lab and to print out the illustrations of my thesis for the exhibition. For this, a member of the student services had to escort me to the PrintLab. While printing the illustrations, the PrintLab's staff arrived and told me I wasn't allowed to be there and after a lengthy explanation told me to next time ask for a permission from them as well.

Eventually, I was able to print the illustrations with the laser printers as well as with the massive large-scale printer which is meant for printing big photographs. I knew it would be difficult to get a permission to use the PrintLab again, so I took several prints in different sizes, just in case.

The gallerist chose which ones of the prints were the best size, which were the biggest ones I had printed. She also knew I could find frames which fit them in the store called Granit. I went to two big malls before I found a Granit store where the staff told me that they did not have those frames in months, but just today they had received a shipment which had those specific frames as well. They promised to reserve me twelve of them as soon as they found them underneath all the other packages in the store. I returned later in the evening to pick them up. In the morning the gallerist helped me put up the twelve digital prints which I had printed and framed, and then she went home as she was having flu symptoms which later turned out not to be COVID-19.

Fig 135. Working with the gallerist. Westin, Miila. (2020).

The next day I did not come to the gallery until late as I was writing a several pages long introduction for the exhibition. I knew I would not be able to discuss the myths with all of the visitors but wanted to share my findings of the myths in some way. While writing the introduction, the gallerist called me about the stickers we had ordered for the walls and windows of the gallery. The window stickers were apparently perfect, but the texts on the walls were too big. We improvised and tried out a few options and eventually placed the stickers all around the gallery. In the end it worked surprisingly well and seemed as if I had painted around the stickers on purpose.

The opening of the exhibition was on the 13th of August 2020. There were only a handful of guests, but it was a good thing as the association of the gallery had announced that only five people were allowed in the space at once. The rest of the guests were asked to wait outside, where unfortunately a massive road construction was going on. Luckily the construction work had ceased by the time we opened.

During the exhibition opening three or four people asked me what the typeface of the exhibition's title was. Eczar type family is part of Google Fonts and designed by Vaibhav Singh. I needed a typeface with a suitable license to use it freely as the title of my exhibition, and I had vaguely in my mind what I was looking for. I searched for a typeface which would seem old and modern at the same time, and something that would have both roundness and sharp little details. I knew Eczar was perfect for my purposes as soon as I saw it.

Fig 136. Eps -sticker files for the windows. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Many of the guests in the exhibition also commented that they noticed something Miyazaki-like in the artworks. Miyazaki is the Japanese movie director of Studio Ghibli I mentioned earlier in chapter 5, and I admire his movies. To me, hearing that my works resemble his, is a compliment. When I applied to Aalto University, I believe I wrote something about Miyazaki in my application. Someone also mentioned that there was something they associated with Tove Jansson as well, but that despite these similarities my works are still clearly mine.

Personally, I do see in my artworks some resemblance not only to Japanese but also Mexican art. The colourful wooden figures I have seen in southeast of Mexico have clearly been an inspiration for me, although I did not recognize it while creating the artworks. I also do love the Moomin characters Tove Jansson has created, although I have only read one of her books.

8.5. The interviews, the exposure and critique

As a part of the exhibition the gallerist interviewed me in Finnish for the Galleria Kuvitus's podcast. The podcast can be listened to at play.acast.com/s/galleria-kuvitus . Yle Radio Suomi also came to interview me at the exhibition, which was a new experience for me. I was very nervous to give an interview on a radio show. Unfortunately, the radio interview cannot be re-listened online.

The exhibition was a part of Helsinki Design Week as well, which meant even more exposure for the artworks. On the Helsinki Design Week's website my exhibition was presented here: www.helsinkidesignweek.com/events/miila-westin-the-mythical/. The gallery, Galleria Kuvitus, also created a website for the exhibition, which can be seen here: kuvittajat.fi/gallery-exhibitions/miila-westin, as well as on the gallery's Instagram page, which is found here: instagram.com/galleriakuvitus/.

I was happy with the execution and overall end result of the exhibition despite having several panicky moments before finishing it. This was my first solo exhibition, and I was happy to see it turn out as well as it did. If I were to re-create the exhibition, I would do a number of things differently. For one, I would plan the exhibition space in more detail beforehand and leave less room for improvisation. I would hopefully not make some of the mistakes such as forgetting the bleeds of digital prints or make the text stickers too massive. I would print the artworks early on at a professional printing house instead of dealing with Covid-19 procedures at the university.

I had planned, timewise, that this thesis would have been ready before the exhibition and presented there. I also planned to show more sketches and reveal the process of working as an illustrator, but I did not think about it early enough in advance. In the end the gallerist came up with the idea of how to include the sketches in the exhibition.

Next time it would be wise to also include the gallerist more in the process of creating the artworks. She told me early on, that it was a part of the process that she would visit me while I work with the pieces for the exhibition. In the end, partly because of the Covid-19 situation, we only had one video call and that was it. It was enough for me as I like to work independently, but I could have asked her opinion on more things concerning the exhibition.

If I were to re-build the exhibition, I would rethink how to attach the four-meter painting on the wall more effectively. The gallerist liked how the artwork's corners dangled, but I disliked it and secretly added more two-sided tape all around the back side of the artwork. Despite this, the corners kept popping out and revealed the backside of the artwork, as well as my scribbles on the paper and the wall. I tried adding more magnets as well to keep it in place, but nothing worked.

I already talked some about what I would change in the artworks. Despite the works succeeding and failing in various ways, I am still happy with them as a whole. There is room for improvement with the layouts of the illustrations as well as postures, colours and other details, but knowing how much work was put into creating the exhibition, it is difficult for me to criticize the artworks too much. There will always be room for improvement, and it is the continuous, lifelong struggle of all artists and illustrators.

Fig 137. Finished exhibition space. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Chapter 9:
The conclusions and thoughts

In the previous chapter I described the process of the illustrations as well as the exhibition. This is the final chapter, in which I will reflect on the overall process and draw conclusions.

9.1. The thesis process as a whole

When I began my thesis process, I had already familiarized myself with various mythical narratives of other cultures. I have been interested in ancient civilizations and myths for a long time, but it took me a while to become interested in the Finnish myths and my own cultural roots.

When I finally began reading up on the Finnish mythical narratives, what I found surprised me. My idea of Kalevala had been completely wrong, and I was happy to find out that there were massive amounts of mythical stories I had never even heard of. My intuitive response was that I wanted other people to hear about them as well.

In the beginning I was especially inspired by the stories about Finnish shamans. I wanted to create a story about shamanism and about life in the old, mythical Finland. I also planned on making it into a comic. I have a peculiar way to draw comics and illustrations, as I illustrate them in a horizontally flowing format, as can be seen in one of the final artworks of the exhibition. In the end, after the thesis is finished I will write a visual narrative, although it won't be entirely about shamanism.

I also did an animation minor during the thesis process and with the teachers we discussed the possibility of creating an animation as my thesis work. The underlying idea was that my studies were focused on visual narrative and thus I wanted to create a narrative as my thesis. My vision was to bring the myths I was reading about into a visual form. I even thought of creating a website, which would contain illustrated stories, but soon realized it was too much for a thesis project.

I mention all this to show that I knew all along what I was interested in, but had a hard time finding a way to form a project around my topic. When I eventually started my thesis process, I was eager to start illustrating as quickly as possible. Unfortunately my angle to the topic was not the best at this point, and I ended up taking a longer route than was necessary. I got stuck with the amount of information I found, and it took me over a year to wade through it. Looking back, I should have planned the research better and asked for more help in narrowing down the research material.

I started the project by fetching five books from the library about Finnish folklore and its research. As I was browsing through them, I gradually realized how much reading my thesis would require. From this point on, I continuously struggled with fact and fiction, or what was "real and true" versus free expression and interpretation. I did eventually come to terms with these, but it was a long process.

Looking back, my thesis advisor Zach Dodson suggested from the very beginning of the process that I would not get too stuck with the "facts" of the myths. He advised me to make the stories my own, because it would serve my goals and for this project it would be enough: "Your thesis is not about old folktales but about your visual versions of them." After quite a while I finally arrived at the same conclusion.

Fig 138. Pellon Pekko. Westin, Miila. (2020).

In the midst of the process I applied for several art grants. I did not receive any for the research part of the project, but eventually got two for a comic project which was based on my research. Still, applying for the grants helped a lot, because it pressured me to refine my topic and think about the project as a whole as well as why I was doing this. Gradually, I managed to identify the aspects of my projects which were interesting to other people, and what I wanted to do for myself.

One of my thesis supervisors, Arja Karhumaa, advised me to think about what I was most interested in the Finnish myths. It was clearly the characters and creatures, so she recommended me to focus on them. As I read further on my thesis subject though, I forgot about the advice. I was curious about too many things and was not able to focus. I ended up reading several books from cover to cover and had to later again look up the parts which actually had to do with my thesis subject. I made lists and mind maps of characters, proverbs, individual myths, things about the past worldviews, and long lists of things that needed further clarification. I felt like I was diving into a fantasy world created by a fictional writer.

Inspired by this mythical world I was eager to start the artistic product of the thesis project. At first, I drew several storyboards and sketched plots and characters. But writing stories while still researching wasn't a good idea, as I kept running into contradicting information and started to feel like I didn't really know enough about my subject.

For example, six months after starting my thesis project I found out that the Hiisi character in my story had actually originally meant a sacred forest, not a forest goblin of sorts, as how it is nowadays understood. I decided I couldn't make the myths more known if I myself didn't know them better. I found more books and read more and started to simply sketch all kinds of characters without really knowing what to do with them. I still wanted the work to be a finished product in some way but hesitated on creating a complete story at this point.

In September 2019 I participated in a workshop 'Elves at the airport', which focused on using folklore in comics and was run by author Atla Hrafney, comic artist Apila Pepita and folklorist Jere Poikela. During the workshop I created a short collaborative comic with Icelandic Einar Valur Másson, and all of the short stories continued to be exhibited in Reykjavik, Iceland, and a comic festival in Oulu, Finland.

In the workshop we discussed how to interpret something you don't know about quite yet, and who should interpret what. We talked about 'authority damage control', which has to do with cultural appropriation. As Atla Hrafney explained, one should ask themselves if they are the right person to tell the story, and how is it relevant to you. I also became more familiar with problems with visualizing folklore such as reference material, who has collected the material, when, and from whom. Hrafney mentioned also a good guideline to follow when interpreting folklore: "When it's someone else's, treat it gently. When it's yours, you can do more and get away with it." Looking back, I suppose in my case I did more and may get away with it since I am using the stories and reference material of my own culture.

Fig 139. Image by galleria Kuvitus (2020).

Eventually, during the process, I realized I simply tried to do too many things at the same time. I also pondered what I wanted to say with the stories. What did I specifically wish to discuss? Why was it important to let children know about old mythical narratives? I contemplated for a long time how to best deal with my thesis subject in the time frame I had left. Should I simply create illustrations of the mythical characters or should I aim for complete illustrated story? Eventually, I was able to find satisfying answers to all of these questions.

In autumn 2019 I applied for an exhibition space in Galleria Kuvitus, which is the gallery space of Finnish Illustrators Association. In a few months I found out that I was one of the chosen artists of 2020. Because of this, I decided to narrow down my thesis project yet again and simply to illustrate six characters and introduce them in the thesis, and then continue on to create an exhibition. The process of the illustrations and the exhibition from there on has been explained in the previous chapter.

9.2. Answering the research question 'How should an illustrator approach illustrating Finnish myths and folklore for children?'

After completing my project, I will attempt to give some advice on what an illustrator could consider when beginning a project relating to Finnish myths. I can look back and see what I could have done differently, but naturally it is not possible to give a definite answer to this question. Artists "should" do simply what they feel is the right thing to do for them. Personally, I wish illustrators would have the courage to use their imagination when visualizing myths. We do not know how people imagined the mythical beings back in history, thousands or hundreds of years ago.

As an artist, make your interpretation your subjective version the way you wish to make it. Look for new angles and use your imagination for new visual possibilities. Even if the elves in Finland these days always are pictured to have a red pointy hat, there is no reason

Fig 140. Gallery from the street. Westin, Miila. (2020).

to leave out. The myths have changed so tremendously and there are hundreds of versions, so a time frame will help with picking out a version you wish to tell. Illustrating something that keeps changing is a challenge.

If possible, limit your project to a specific area. The myths in Finland vary greatly from area to area. Even in a certain time period the myths evolved differently, as for example Hiisi kept its original meaning longer in the Eastern Finland than in the West, which was converted to Christianity more rapidly.

When creating mythical images for children on the other hand, there are some points that may need to be taken into account. I have previously discussed the need for cuteness and bright colors, which is not necessarily a need at all. In illustrations for children it is sometimes a challenge to notice where to draw the line between scary and cute.

In a recent project I used quite dark colors and drew a cat-like version of Ahti. A colleague's child saw it and said that it looked too scary, and we ended up changing it into a brighter version. In this example, I had thought that the colors did not matter that much, but a child saw the illustration very differently. For this reason, I tried to be careful when using darker colors in my works.

My experience with children's illustrations isn't as long as my experience with illustrating for adults, and for that reason I ended up taking the safer route when creating my illustrations for children. An illustrator of myths with more experience with children's illustration could be better equipped to find out how much cuteness and colorfulness is enough, and when it is too much.

Finally, as an illustrator of myths, do consider cultural appropriation. Although I personally think it's to stick to this. I did, yes, but otherwise my elf is peculiar and different from the general idea of an elf. Experimenting shouldn't do any harm to anyone but might instead lead to something fresh and interesting.

Illustrators and artists create visuals for other people, who sometimes are not maybe as visual in their creativity. How we imagine things can affect a lot on how other people imagine something. If we draw a fictional creature two tails and antlers, many people may keep that visual in their head when thinking about that being. Consider this when creating visuals about something that may or may not have been visualized much.

Some illustrators may argue that visualizations of myths need to add to the knowledge of the myths and be informative, but in my opinion we don't have a lot of hard knowledge and it is not certain that we have the right idea about the mindset and imagination of the people in the past. It is good to read up as much as you can and to know the possible facts, but after that it is time for imagination.

One suggestion is that illustrators of myths should consider deciding on a time period. I did not do this, and at some point it became clear that it could have saved me a lot of time to know what to include and what

Mythical

14.8. - 19.9.2020

Have you heard about Rongoteus and Ägräs?

Miila Westin's exhibition of Finnish mythical beings is part of her Master of Arts thesis in Aalto University. While researching the Finnish ancient religion the illustrator noticed how abundantly there were myths and stories which were not a part of Kalevala.

New interpretations keep ancient myths alive. In the future, the characters in the exhibition will continue their lives in a visual narrative project aimed for children.

Miila Westin (b.1987) lives and works in Helsinki.

Fig 141. Text on the wall. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 142. Exhibition space. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 143. Miila Westin. (2020)

Fig 144. Works on the wall. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 145. The wall. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 146. Sketches. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 147. Natural elements. Westin, Miila. (2020).

Fig 148. Hongotar. Westin, Miila. (2020).

better the more the old stories are told and the more versions there are, everyone may not share this opinion. Also, think about why the myth is important to you and why do you wish to tell it the way you do.

9.3. Critical reflection of the artistic process and outcome

As an artist, I challenged myself in various ways during this project. I picked up painting again after years of working with digital mediums, and gouache none the less. It was exciting to learn to paint with a new medium, but at times frustrating as well. For one, gouache doesn't fix to the canvas like watercolours or acrylic paints do. Instead, it is possible to pick a spot in the painting, add some water to it and continue where you left off, as the paint can be re-liquified. After painting for days, I would sometimes notice I had dropped a bit of water here or there, and I had to return back to fix the spots. This proved challenging, as the shade you mix with gouache is always different than the shade it is when it dries up. I had to learn to mix the new shades into the old ones in an unnoticeable way. I did like gouache paints though and will likely continue working with them.

Another challenge for myself was the size of the canvas. I am often not very consistent in my art, but now I had to stick to a certain style, a specific colour scheme and style of sketching for half a year. Of course, it did not take half a year to paint it, but as I didn't get funding for my studies at that point, I needed to do other work while painting to pay the bills. Also, the size of the canvas itself made several exhibition visitors comment that they wouldn't have been able to stick to it. It is easily overwhelming to see in front of you the whole piece and to all the time calculate, how many days you will still need with it before it is finished. I became quite good with my estimations, though.

The square, digital illustrations were easier, as I simply drew them with pencils and then turned them into digital artworks. I had done similar works before with Wacom and iPad, but this time I experimented more with colour schemes, as I felt like they were not my strong suit. I also ran into problems with the file types, as for example the colours I created in the iPad were really pale when I switched back to editing the images on my computer and Photoshop. In the end it was nice to hear the exhibition visitors praise the colours I had chosen.

During this research I found many kinds of illustrations about the Finnish mythical creatures, although they were often conventional in many ways. In my project I attempted to challenge these conventions and to propose that illustrators could use their artistic freedom more in mythical illustrations.

Nevertheless, I also paid attention to the fact that often professional illustrators do not have the time and resources to find out more about their subject, so they simply illustrate what the author of a book expects them to. This may not leave a lot of space for imagination, if the author has a clearer idea about what they want in comparison to what the artist might be able to create.

At times though, it seemed like the illustrations I found were simply the artists personal idea about, say, a general water spirit, not a specific one. In the midst of the process, I also fell into this trap of illustrating something general and conventional, something my mind recalled from somewhere else.

When I was sketching my version of the water spirit Vetehinen, I re-created something I have seen often before, or at least that is how I felt like about the illustration. My version is not original in any way. Same was with Ahti, which I believe my subconsciousness mixed with selkies somehow. I found mentions of Ahti being the protector of seals and appearing in the form of a seal, but it is possible that I picked that version to illustrate because it felt subconsciously familiar.

Then again, when illustrating Para, Tapio, Hongatar, Pellon Pekko and Sämpsä Pellervoinen, I felt like I succeeded in creating a very personal and imaginative version of a being which had not been visualized often, or at least not in the same way. As I wrote earlier, I find it interesting if an artist finds a new way to visualize a unicorn in an uncommon manner. In the end I feel like I succeeded in this partially. Some of my illustrations were more creative and fresher, but a few of the characters eventually turned out to be quite basic and common.

I had set a few guidelines for my illustration process. I wanted to aim for something playful, colourful, modern and possibly Finnish, and in retrospect I do feel like I achieved that. The illustrations are playful, colourful and modern, but possibly not too Finnish. I am fine with that result though, as at this point, I don't think I know anymore what I would even consider "Finnish".

Fig 149. Rongoteus. Westin, Miila. (2020).

9.4. Challenges and limitations of the research process

As the first and most obvious challenge I would like to emphasize that I am not a folklore researcher and gathering all of the research material for this thesis took plenty of time in the beginning of the process. It was also a challenge to study something which has not been studied much beforehand. Finding material or even figuring out where to look for material was very time consuming and slow. Also, the books and other material I found did not contain a lot of information about the appearance of the beings I wanted to study, which I suppose was a finding in itself.

If I were to re-do the research, I would already in the beginning narrow down the subject more as well as force myself to focus only on the material relevant to my topic. I would also ask for help with finding the right research material, as some of the essential books and articles I discovered quite late in the process.

Since the research did not include a survey or any kind of data really, I can not reveal specific results in numbers. The findings of the study serve most likely as a resource for future myth illustrators and as a collection of information.

I did consider other research methods in the beginning of the project and planned on creating, for example, a survey to ask people which myths they were least familiar with. I would have then used the survey to illustrate the least known myths. In the end though, I decided to hold onto my artistic freedom and not to ask other people what I should illustrate.

My approach all along was very subjective, and it was surprising to come to the conclusion that I should have been even more subjective from the beginning. If I would do the thesis again, I would discard most of the research on what other illustrators have done and what the so called facts of the myths are, and simply immediately start writing and illustrating the myths from my personal standpoint.

I had always thought that doing a thesis research would not be such a difficult task everyone made it sound to be. Partly because of that, I gave myself the extra challenge of writing this in English which is not my native language. If I would do this thesis again, I believe writing it in Finnish would take me half the time, but at this point I am happy I chose to challenge myself. I also found out that writing the whole thing was not the challenge people talked about, but the organization of information. At least for me, that was the greatest challenge of creating this thesis.

If I were to continue or re-do this research, I would pay more attention to organization of files, notes, images and references. If anything went wrong at any point, I would say it was because of the chaos I created while doing the research. Now I know, that organizing things well is key, and I wish I had realized it sooner.

I thought a few times that it would have been wise to choose a topic I know more about beforehand. Then again, I am happy I chose Finnish myths and their visualizations as my thesis subject, as this topic continues to interest me and feels important to me. Although the project was very time consuming and at times difficult, I have nevertheless enjoyed diving into this thesis research. I gained a lot of knowledge and inspiration and feel now equipped to continue creating various narratives around the themes and stories in Finnish mythology.

I hope my work will serve as inspiration as well as knowledge to those who also wish to study and interpret our vast ancient narratives. Maybe this thesis will help them to start their work from a more informed standpoint. I feel like my studies on the subject are not over, and I hope in the coming years we will find plenty of new information on everything mentioned in this thesis.

Fig 150. Sketch for the mural in Hakunila, 2020. Westin, Miila. (2020).

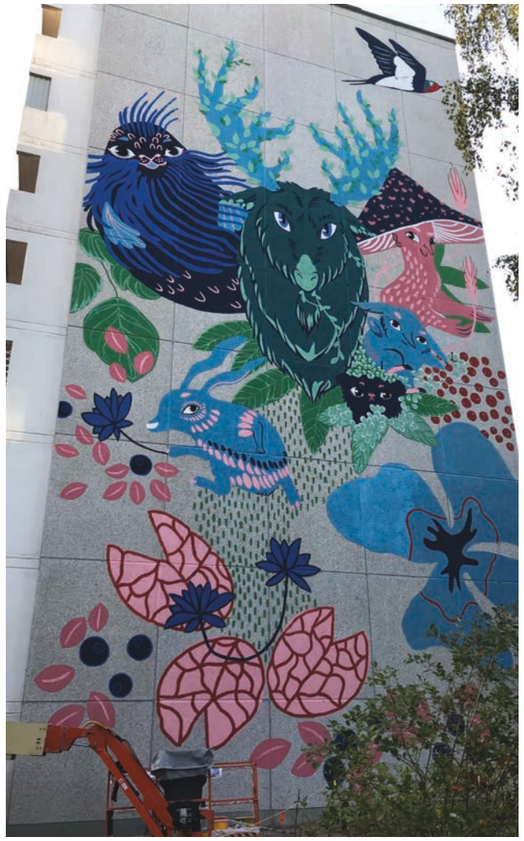

Fig 151. The finished wall mural. Raunio, Kirsi-Maria. (2020).

9.5. The biggest takeaway for me

Looking back at this massive two-year-long project, I feel like I completed a minor study in Finnish folklore. I learned a lot about the mythical stories of my own culture, and now I believe I have a fair understanding of how the myths in Finland evolved into the shape they are in today. I also found plenty of material to work on in my future projects.

Compared to the beginning of the process, I now have a much better standpoint when explaining in detail how my characters are similar or different in comparison to the beings in the myths. I feel I am now better equipped to discuss my subject with people who actually have studied folklore more extensively. I also think that it is valuable in itself that people from different backgrounds study the same subject and what is interesting to them in it. For example, someone with a musical background might have and interesting skillset to study the Karelian sung poetry and maybe they could discover new aspects in it.

The main thing I learned is that there is plenty of room for imagination and interpretation in the world of visualizing myths. I had previously thought that myths needed to be interpreted somehow based on historical facts. This is why I struggled in the beginning, trying to find information and facts about myths. Later, after seeing various works of art which simply refer to myths but interpret them in an unexpected way, I felt encouraged to put the facts and historical documents aside. In retrospect, it feels silly to have taken such a long road to my goal, but I did learn a lot on the way.

9.6. After the thesis

The first thing that will happen after the thesis is finished is that I will begin my visual narrative project. As I have received two art grants from WSOYn kirjallisuussäätiö Literature Association of WSOY) as well as Sarjakuvantekijät ry (Comic Creators Association) I will next take all of my sketches and short narratives I've scribbled during this process and begin to create a children's visual narrative about Finnish mythical beings.

The first narrative will be about Sämpsä Pellervoinen. In the story there will be a girl who notices that spring is late, and her grandmother tells her that it is because the summer boy has not woken up Sämpsä. The girl decides to take off into the Finnish winter and find Sämpsä. On her way she meets various mythical beings

familiar from the illustrations I have introduced in this thesis.

Eventually, I will create all kinds of projects using what I have learned about Finnish folklore during the process of this thesis. So far, I have ideas for a game and a website, to name a few. We will see which one I will end up working on after the visual narrative. I have already created mythical textiles about the stories, which are printed and sold by a Finnish company, Ehta by Dream Circus. I also helped with creating a wall mural sketch based on the myths, which was painted in Hakunila, Helsinki, by Kirsi-Maria Raunio, Viivi Vierinen and Jenni Väisänen in the autumn 2020.

What comes to research, I feel that there is a huge amount of research to be done on Finnish myths. As a visual narrator I will keep studying the old stories and make narratives and illustrations of them. I hope that people from different backgrounds will take an interest in the myths and there will be more research done from various standpoints. I also intend to familiarize myself with the rock paintings found in Finland. I am also keen to learn more about the ancient Hiisi places as well as the old settlements.

Recently I have also taken a new, deeper interest in myths elsewhere, and find it interesting to learn about myth research and different theories on it. In short, I definitely intend to study this topic further.

9.7. Final thoughts

My interest in Finnish myths stems from my interest in myths in other countries. I have all my life been an avid traveler and visited almost every continent. I have been to the Mayan and Inca temples in the Americas, I have crawled under the pyramids in Egypt and wandered on the temple grounds of Angor Wat in Cambodia. I have visited castles and museums in Japan and South-Korea and driven to the sacred aboriginal mountain Uluru in the middle of Australia. While on top of a Sri Lankan Sigiriya mountain top temple or a Burmese temple in Old Pagan area, I've always felt privileged to be able to see such old monuments and tried to think what the people in those times may have thought and felt and seen. How did they perceive the world around them?

It may be a classic story, but it took me a long time to turn my eyes to my own culture. I was enthusiastic in my history studies, but never quite thrilled to learn about Finnish history. I paid a lot of money to see all kinds of sights around the world, but to this day have not seen a single one of the wall paintings we have in Finland. The purpose of my thesis is to try to help someone like me to look at their surrounding with new eyes. To read about the Finnish ancient times, the older myths as well as the folklore, and to interpret it in their own way. I wish there would be more art, more books, more comics and more everything about the Finnish myths. Because when I finally opened my eyes to them, I could hardly believe what a fantastic ancient history I found.

"Everyone has their own ways of living the fascinating images of folk religion."

"Jokaisella on omat tapansa elää kansanuskon kiehtovia kuvia." (Korte, 2007, p.14).

Fig 152. Sämpsä Pellervoinen. Westin, Miila. (2020).

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